





THE ISLE *of* DEAD SHIPS

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"NO," HE MURMURED, SADLY. "IT IS NOT LAND. IT IS
WRECKAGE."

The Isle of Dead Ships

By
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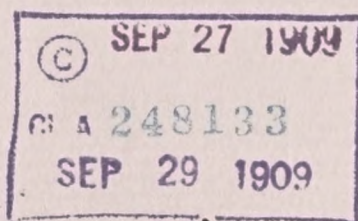
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PROLOGUE

THERE is a floating island in the sea where no explorer has set foot, or, setting foot, has returned to tell of what he saw. Lying at our very doors, in the direct path of every steamer from the Gulf of Mexico to Europe, it is less known than is the frozen pole. Encyclopedias pass over it lightly; atlases dismiss it with but a slight mention; maps do not attempt to portray its ever-shifting outlines; even the Sunday newspapers, so keen to grasp everything of interest, ignore it.

But on the decks of great ships in the long watches of the night, when the trade-wind snores through the rigging and the waves purr about the bows, the sailor tells strange tales of the spot where ruined ships, raked derelict from all the square miles of ocean, form a great

island, ever changing, ever wasting, yet ever lasting; where, in the ballroom of the Atlantic, draped round with encircling weed, they drone away their lives, balancing slowly in a mighty tourbillion to the rhythm of the Gulf Stream.

Fanciful? Sailors' tales? Stories fit only for the marines? Perhaps! Yet be not too sure! Jack Tar, slow of speech, fearful of ridicule, knows more of the sea than he will tell to the newspapers. Perhaps more than one has drifted to the isle of dead ships, and escaped only to be disbelieved in the maelstroms that await him in all the seaports of the world.

Facts are facts, none the less because passed on only by word of mouth, and this tale, based on matter gleaned beneath the tropic stars, may be truer than men are wont to think. Remember Longfellow's words:

"Wouldst thou," thus the steersman answered,
"Learn the secret of the sea?
Only those that brave its dangers
Comprehend its mystery."

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I

As the prisoner and Officer Jackson, handcuffed together, came up the gang-plank, Renfrew, the attorney, standing on the promenade deck above, turned from his contemplation of the city of San Juan as it lay green and white in the afternoon sun, and bent forward.

“By George,” he cried, exultingly, “that’s Frank Howard! He’s caught! Caught here, of all places in the world!”

With hands tight gripped on the rail he watched the two men until they disappeared below; then, eager to share his discovery of the ending of a quest that had extended over two continents, he turned and hurried along the deck to

where two ladies stood leaning against the taffrail.

“Yes, my dear,” the elder was saying, “Porto Rico is pretty enough for any one. It looked pretty when I came, and it looks prettier as I go. But when you say it’s pretty, you exhaust its excellences. I, for one, shall be glad to see the last of it. And, considering the errand that takes you home, I imagine that you don’t regret leaving, either.”

“The errand! I don’t understand, Mrs. Renfrew.”

“Why! Your—but here comes Philip, evidently with something on his mind. Do listen to him patiently, if you can, my dear. He hasn’t had a jury at his mercy for a month. Unless somebody lets him talk, I’m afraid his bottled-up eloquence will strike in and prove fatal. Well, Philip!”

Mr. Renfrew was close at hand.

“Miss Fairfax! Maria!” he cried. “Who do you think is on board, a pris-

oner? Frank Howard! I just saw him brought over the gang-plank. He escaped two months ago, and the police have been looking for him ever since. They must have just caught him, or I should have heard of it. Who in the world can I ask?"

He gazed around questioningly.

"Now, Philip, wait a moment. Who is Frank Howard? and what has the poor man done?"

Mr. Renfrew snorted.

"The poor man, Maria," he retorted, "is one of the biggest scoundrels unhung. As state's attorney it was my duty to prosecute him, and I may say that I have seldom taken more pleasure in any task. I have spoken to you of the case often enough, Maria, for you to know something about it. I should really be glad if you would take some interest in your husband's affairs."

Mrs. Renfrew clapped her hands.

"Of course! I remember now," she

said, soothingly. "It was only his name I forgot. Mr. Howard is that swindler who robbed so many poor people, isn't he, Philip?"

"Nothing of the sort, madam," thundered the lawyer. "Frank Howard was an officer of the United States Navy. While stationed at this very island of Porto Rico he secretly married an ignorant but very beautiful girl, and then deserted her. She followed him to New York, and wrote him a letter telling him where she was. He went to her address and murdered her—strangled her with his own hands. He was caught red-handed, convicted, and would have been put to death before now if he hadn't escaped.

"I am telling this for your benefit, Miss Fairfax. There is no use in talking to Mrs. Renfrew; details of my affairs go in one of her ears and out the other."

"That may not be as uncommon as you think, Mr. Renfrew," consoled the

girl, laughing. "But, as it happens, I am especially interested in the Howard case. I am very well acquainted with one of the officers who was on his ship when he met the girl."

Mrs. Renfrew clapped her hands.

"Oh! of course," she bubbled. "Of course! I remember all about it now. It was Mr. Loving, of course! I had forgotten that he was on the same ship. Philip, you didn't know that Miss Fairfax was going to marry Lieutenant Loving, did you?"

Mr. Renfrew turned his eye-glasses on the girl, who flushed with mingled anger and amusement.

"Are you a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, Mrs. Renfrew," she inquired, "that you can read the future? I assure you that I have had no advance information on the matter. Mr. Loving hasn't even asked me yet. But, of course, if you know——"

"Good gracious! Isn't it true? Why,

I got a paper from New York to-day that spoke of it as all settled. The paper is in my state-room now. If you'd like to see it, we'll go down. Philip, find out all you can about Mr. Howard, and tell us just as soon as you can."

Mr. Renfrew nodded.

"I'll go and ask the captain," he promised, as the two ladies turned away.

The captain, however, proved not to be communicative. Not only was he too busy with the preparations for departure, but he was nettled because the presence of the convict on board had become known. Convicts are not welcome passengers on ships, like the *Queen*, whose chief office is to carry presumably timid pleasure passengers, and their presence is always carefully concealed.

"I know nothing at all about it, Mr. Renfrew," he asserted, gruffly. "You had better ask the purser."

The purser was no more pleased at the inquiry than his chief had been, but he hid his vexation better.

“Yes,” he admitted, with apparent readiness, “Mr. Howard is on board. He was caught here last week. He was up at a village called Lagonitas——”

“That’s where his wife lived—the one he murdered.”

“Is it? I didn’t know. Well, they caught him. He surrendered quietly—didn’t try to fight or run. He hadn’t anywhere to run to, you know.”

“And where is he confined?”

“Amidships—in one of the second-class cabins. We have plenty vacant this trip. Officer Jackson is with him, where he can keep close watch. You tell your ladies not to be uneasy. He can’t possibly get out. Jackson has got a hundred weight of iron, more or less, on him.”

“Jackson, is it? I thought I recognized him. One of those bulldog fellows that never lets go. I’m interested in Howard because it was I who conducted the prosecution at his trial.”

“Gee! Is that so? It must have been exciting. He confessed, didn’t he?”

“Confessed? Not he! Took the stand as brazen as you please, and swore he had never seen the woman before he went to her room that day in response to a letter and found her dead. It was nothing less than barefaced impudence, you know. The proof against him was simply overwhelming.”

“He denied having married her, then?”

“He denied everything. Swore it was a case of mistaken identity. I demolished that quickly enough. Dozens of people had seen him up at Lagonitas with the girl. We even sent for the minister who performed the marriage ceremony, but he never arrived—lost at sea on the way to New York. But there was plenty of proof, anyway. The jury found him guilty without leaving their seats.”

II

WHEN Dorothy Fairfax came on deck again the sun was dropping fast toward the horizon. A gusty breeze was blowing and the steamer was pitching slightly in the short, choppy seas that characterize West Indian waters. Movement had become unpleasant to those inclined to seasickness and this, combined with the comparative lightness of the passenger list, caused the deck of the Queen to be nearly deserted.

Dorothy was glad of it. She wanted solitude in order to think in peace, and there was seldom solitude for her when young men—or old men, for that matter—were near. They seemed to gravitate naturally to her side.

Mrs. Renfrew's words, and especially the paragraph in the New York paper, were troubling her. She could see the

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words now, published under a San Juan date-line:

“Miss Dorothy Fairfax, daughter of the multi-millionaire railroader, John Fairfax, will sail next week for New York to order her trousseau for her coming marriage with Lieutenant Loving, U. S. N. Mr. Fairfax, who is financing the railroad here, will follow in about three weeks.”

That was all; the whole thing taken for granted! Evidently the writer had supposed that the engagement had been already announced, or he would either have made some inquiry or—supposing that he was determined to publish—would have “spread” himself on the subject. Miss Fairfax had been written up enough to know that her engagement would be worth at least a column to the society editors of the New York papers. Yes, she concluded, the item must have emanated from some chance correspondent who had picked up a stray bit of gossip.

She had known Mr. Loving for two years or more, and had liked him. Three

months before, at the close of the Howard trial, she had become convinced that he intended to ask her to marry him, and she had slipped away to join her father in Porto Rico in order to gain time to think before deciding on her answer. And here she was, returning home, no more resolved than when she had left.

It was odd that her ship should also bear Lieutenant Howard, of whom Mr. Loving had been so fond, standing by him all through his trial when everybody else fell away. She had had a glimpse of Mr. Howard once, and vaguely recalled him, wondering what combination of desperate circumstances could have brought a man like him to the commission of such a crime.

The judge, she remembered, in sentencing him to death had declared that no mercy should be shown to one who, with everything to keep him in the straight path, had deliberately gone wrong.

The soft pad of footsteps on the deck

roused her from her musings, and she turned to see the purser drawing near.

“Ah! Good evening, Miss Fairfax!” he ventured. “We missed you at tea. Feeling the motion a bit? It is a little rough, ain’t it?”

Miss Fairfax did not like the purser, but she found it difficult to snub any one. Therefore she answered the man pleasantly, though not with any especial enthusiasm.

“Why! no, Mr. Sprigg. I don’t consider this rough; I’m rather a good sailor, you know. I simply wasn’t hungry at tea-time.”

Mr. Sprigg came closer.

“By the way, Miss Fairfax,” he insinuated. “You know Lieutenant Howard is on board. If you’d like to have a peep at him, just say the word and I’ll manage. Oh!” he added, hastily, as a slight frown marred Miss Fairfax’s pretty brows, “I know you must be interested in his case. He’s a friend of

Lieutenant Loving, and I read the notice in the paper to-day, you know."

The look the girl gave him drove the smirk in haste from his face.

"The notice in the paper was entirely without foundation, Mr. Sprigg," she declared, coldly. "As for seeing Mr. Howard, I'm afraid my tastes do not run in that direction. Besides, he probably would not like to be stared at. He was a gentleman once, you know."

She turned impatiently away and looked eastward. Then she uttered an exclamation.

"Why! Whatever's happened to the water?" she cried.

The question was not surprising. In the last hour the sea had changed. From a smiling playfellow, lightly buffeting the ship, it had grown cold and sullen. The sparkles had died from the waves, giving place to a metallic lustre. Long, slow undulations swelled out of the southeast, chasing each other sluggishly up in the wake of the ship.

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It did not need a sailor's eye to tell that something was brewing. Miss Fairfax shivered slightly and drew her light wrap closer around her.

"Makes you feel cold, don't it?" asked Mr. Sprigg cheerfully. "Lord bless you, that's nothing to the way you'll feel before it's over. Funny the weather bureau didn't give us any storm warnings before we sailed."

The weather bureau had, but the warnings had been thrown away, unposted, by a sapient native official of San Juan, who considered the efforts of the Americans to foretell the weather to be immoral.

"Will there be any danger?"

"Danger? Naw! Not a bit of it. If you stay below, you won't even know that there's been anything doing. Even if we run into a hurricane, which ain't likely, we'll be just as safe as if we were ashore. The Queen don't need to worry about anything short of an island or a derelict."

"A derelict?"

“Sure. A ship that has been abandoned at sea for some reason or other, but that ain’t been broken up or sunk. Derelicts are real terrors, all right.”

“Some of ’em float high; they ain’t so bad, because you can usually see ’em in time to dodge, and because they ain’t likely to be solid enough to do you much damage even if you do run into them. But some of ’em float low—just awash—and they’re just— Well, they’re mighty bad. They ain’t really ships any more; they’re solid bulks of wood.”

“I suppose they are all destroyed sooner or later?”

The little purser unconsciously struck an attitude. “A good deal later, sometimes,” he qualified. “Derelicts have been known to float for three years in the Atlantic, and to travel for thousands of miles. Generally, however, in the North Atlantic, they either break up in a storm within a few months, or else they drift into the Sargasso Sea and stay there till they sink.”

“The Sargasso Sea? Where is that? I suppose I used to know when I went to school, but I’ve forgotten.”

Mr. Sprigg waved his hand toward the east and north. “Yonder,” he generalized vaguely. “We are on the western edge of it now. See the weed floating in the water there? Farther north and east it gets thicker until it collects into a solid mass that stretches five hundred miles in every direction.

“Nobody knows just what it looks like in the middle, for nobody has ever been there; or, rather, nobody has ever been there and come back to tell about it. Old sailors say that there’s thousands of derelicts collected there.”

“The Gulf Stream encircles the whole ocean in a mighty whirlpool, you know, and sooner or later everything floating in the North Atlantic is caught in it. They may be carried away up to the North Pole, but they’re bound to come south again with the icebergs and back into the

main stream, and some day they get into the west-wind drift and are carried down the Canary current, until the north equatorial current catches them, and sweeps them into the sea over yonder."

"For four hundred years and more—ever since Columbus—derelicts must have been gathering there. Millions of them must have sunk, but thousands must have been washed into the center. Once there, they must float for a long time. There are storms there, of course, but they're only wind-storms—there can't be any waves; the weed is too thick."

"I guess there are ships still afloat there that were built hundreds of years ago. Maybe Columbus's lost caravels are there; maybe people are imprisoned there! Gee! but it's fascinating."

Miss Fairfax stared at the little man in amazement. He was the last person she would ever have suspected of imagination or romance; and here he was, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, de-

claiming away like one inspired. Most men can talk well on some one subject, and this subject was Mr. Sprigg's own. For years he had been reading and talking and thinking about it.

Miss Fairfax rose from her steamer-chair and looked around her, then paused, awestruck. Down in the southeast a mass of black clouds darkened the day as they spread. Puffs of wind ran before them, each carrying sheets of spray torn from the tops of the waves; one stronger than the rest dashed its burden into Miss Fairfax's face with little stinging cuts. The cry of the stewards, "All passengers below!" was not needed to tell her that the deck was rapidly becoming no place for women.

III

AN hour later the deck had grown dangerous, even for men. The Queen drove diagonally through the waves, rolling far to right and to left; and at each roll a miniature torrent swept aboard her, hammered on her tightly-fastened doors, and passed, cataract-wise, back into the deep. Scarcely could the officers, high on the bridge, clinging to stanchions and shielded by strong sheets of canvas, keep their footing. Overhead hooted the gale.

It grew dark. To the gloom of the storm had been added the blackness of the night. Literally, no man could see his hand before his face; even the white foam that broke upon the decks or against the sides passed invisibly.

Still, the ship drove on, held relentlessly to her course. For it was necessary to pass the western line of the weed-

bound sea before turning to the north; and, until this was done, the Queen could not turn tail to the storm.

Toward morning Captain Bostwick struggled to the chart-house and, for the twentieth time, bent over the sheet, figuring and measuring. Then, with careful precision, he punched a dot in the surface and drew a long breath.

“We are all right now,” he announced. “We can bear away north with safety. Nothing can harm us, unless——”

He opened the last chart of the Hydrographic Office and noted some lines drawn in red. His brow grew anxious again and he drew his breath.

“Confound that derelict!” he muttered. “Allowing for drift, she should be close to this very spot. If we should strike her——”

The sentence was never finished. With a shivering shock like that of a railroad train in a head-on collision, the Queen stopped dead, hurling the captain violently over the rail to the deck below.

The first officer was clutching the rope of the siren when the crash came. The slight support it afforded before it gave way saved him from following his commander, and at the same time sent a raucous warning through the ship to close the collision bulkheads.

As he clung desperately to the rail, the Queen rose in the air and came down with another crash; then went forward over something that grated and tore at her hull as she passed. But her bows were buried in the waves, while her screw lashed the air madly.

Had not the involuntary warning of the siren sounded, and had it not been obeyed instantly, the Queen would have plunged in that heart-breaking moment to the bottom. As it was, her shrift seemed short.

The force of her impact on the lumber-laden, water-logged derelict had shattered her bows, and only the forward bulkhead, strained, split, gaping in a hundred seams where the rivets had been

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wrenched loose, kept out the sea. A hurried inspection showed that even that frail protection would probably not long suffice.

“It’s only an hour to dawn,” gasped the first officer. “If she can last till then——”

She lasted, but dawn showed a desperate state of affairs. The Queen had swung round, until her submerged bow pointed to windward and her high stern, catching the gale, plunged dully northward. The seas, rushing up from the southeast, broke on the shelving deck like rollers on a beach, and sent the salt spume writhing up the planks and into the deck state-rooms.

The engine and all the forward part of the ship were drowned, but the great dining-saloon and the staircase leading to the social hall above were still comparatively dry. In the latter and on the deck just outside of it the passengers were huddled. The captain had disappeared,

licked away by the first tongue of sea that had followed the collision.

With the earliest streak of light the first officer decided to take to the boats. Only three remained, and these had already been fitted out with provisions.

As the crew and passengers filed into the first, Officer Jackson, who had several times come on deck, only to wander restlessly below again, once more plunged down into the darkness.

Rapidly yet cautiously he lowered himself down the sloping passageway, clutching at the jambs of empty state-rooms to keep himself from sliding down against the bulkhead, on the other side of which the sea muttered angrily. At last he gained the door he sought, and clung to it while he fitted a key into the lock.

The electric lights had gone out when the engine stopped, and not a thing could be seen in the blackness, but a stir within told that the room was tenanted. Some one was there, staring toward the door.

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Jackson lost no time.

“Here you!” he blustered, in a voice into which there crept a quiver in spite of him. “Last call! The ship’s sinking and they’re taking to the boats. You gotter decide mighty quick if you’re going to come. Just gimme your parole and I’ll turn you loose to fight for your life.”

A voice answered promptly:

“I’ll give no parole. I’d a deal sooner drown here than hang on shore. You can do just as you please about releasing me. It’s a matter of indifference to me.”

The officer tried to protest.

“I don’t want your death on my shoulders, Mr. Howard,” he muttered. “Don’t put me to it.”

Howard laughed sardonically.

“What the devil do I care about your shoulders?” he demanded. “Turn me loose, quick, or get out. Your company isn’t exhilarating, my good Jackson.”

Both men had raised their voices so as to be heard above the boom of the storm. As Howard ceased, there came an impact

heavier than before, followed by faint, despairing shrieks.

With an oath, Jackson felt his way to the voice and bent over the berth in which his prisoner was lying. "Curse you!" he snarled. "For two cents I'd take you at your word and let you drown. But I can't. Here!"

The clink of a key and the rattle of metal told that the handcuffs fell away.

"You're loose now," continued the officer. "But, by Heaven, if you try to escape, I'll see that you don't miss the death you say is welcome. Come on."

Howard swung his legs over the edge of the berth.

"That's fair," he said. "Go ahead. I'll follow."

Hastily, Jackson led the way up the slanting passage to the topsy-turvy stairway, and so to the deck. A single glance about him and he turned on the other in fury. "Curse you," he roared, "you've drowned us both with your infernal palavering!"

The decks were deserted; not a human being remained on them. Tossing on the waves, just visible in the glowing light, were two of the ship's boats, crowded with passengers. The nearest was already a hundred yards away, and rapidly increasing its distance. The guard stared at it hungrily.

"'There' goes our last chance!" he muttered.

Howard eyed the tiny craft dispassionately.

"'Oh! I don't know,'" he said. "'If that boat was your best chance, it was a slim one. Never mind, Jackson; take comfort from me. Nobody doomed to hang was ever drowned. I'll send you home to your wife and babies yet—I suppose you have a wife and babies; people like you always do.'"

"'Here! Don't you take my wife's name on your lips!'"

"'Look! I thought so.'"

The boat, poised for an instant on the

crest of a great wave, suddenly lunged forward, raced madly down a watery slope, and thrust its nose deep into an opposite swelling wave. It did not come up. Long did the two men on the steamer watch, but nothing, living or dead, appeared amid the heaving waves.

At last Howard's tense features relaxed.

"Well," he remarked, carelessly. "That's a mark to my credit, anyhow. I've saved your life, Jackson. Please see that you do me no discredit in the ten minutes that you will retain it."

The other glared at him stupidly.

"Susan didn't want me to come," he mumbled. "She said I'd never come back——"

His voice died away into incoherent murmurs.

Howard looked at the man, and his lip curled contemptuously. He said nothing, however, but turned in silence toward where the boat had sunk.

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The next instant he started and glanced swiftly around him. His eyes fell on a life-preserver lodged in the broken doorway by the last wave that had retreated from his feet. He snatched it up and buckled it round him; then fastened one end of a rope beneath his arms and thrust the other into the hands of the stupefied officer.

“There! Wake up, man!” he ordered. “Wake up and stand by!”

Jackson stared at him. “Where? What? How?” he mumbled.

“Wake up, man! Don’t you see it’s a woman?”

As he saw the returning intelligence dawn in Jackson’s eyes, Howard slipped to the toppling brink of the bulwarks and stood watching for the next heave of the sea. As it came, with a white rag sopping foolishly on its crest, he waved his hand to the other.

“Give my love to Susan!” he cried, and plunged downward.

Chaos! The sea into which he dived was without form and void. Like a grain of corn in a popper, he was tossed hither and thither, twisted, wrenched at—all sense of direction stripped from him.

There was not one chance in a thousand that he would reach the woman; not one in a million that he could give her the least help if he did reach her; the very attempt became preposterous the moment he touched the water. Only blind chance could avail.

The incredible happened. His arm, striking out, caught the girl fairly round the waist and fastened there. He did not try to get back to the ship; he made no reasoned effort at all; reason was impossible in that turmoil.

He struggled, no doubt, but the struggle was unconscious—a mere automatic battle for life. But he clung to the woman, gasping, with oblivion pressing hard upon his reeling brain.

Something seemed to grasp him around

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the waist and drag him backward, and unconsciously he tightened his arm on the waist he held, meeting the wrench as the sea withdrew its support.

Crash! Something had struck him cruelly, but struck realization back into his brain. Before he could act, the sea swelled around him again; but when it withdrew once more, he knew what had happened. Jackson was dragging him back to the wreck, and he had struck against its side or on its submerged deck.

It was the deck! By favor of Providence it was the deck! Aided by the drag of the rope, the last wave washed Howard and his prize almost to the feet of the police officer, who braced himself to withstand the backtow as the water retreated; then reached down and dragged both up to momentary safety.

Howard opened his eyes for one instant.

“Didn’t I tell you I would have a drier death on shore?” he gasped before unconsciousness claimed him.

IV

CONSCIOUSNESS came slowly back to Frank Howard. He raised his head, but otherwise lay still, painfully reconstructing the world around him. So tightly was he wedged between a broken ventilator and a skylight coamings that it was only with considerable difficulty that he finally managed to lift himself to a sitting position and stare dizzily around.

He was alone on the deck, which had become much steeper than he remembered it in the gray dawn. Evidently another bulkhead forward had given way, allowing another compartment to become filled with water and causing the bow of the steamer to sink deeper.

In compensation the stern had risen somewhat higher, so that the waves broke against the deck, but no longer rushed violently up it. The sea, too, had gone

down, curbed perhaps by the thick mantle of yellow weed that floated all about.

With much difficulty he scrambled to his feet, clinging desperately the while to the ventilator.

“Steady! Steady!” he muttered. “If I tobogganed down into that water I shouldn’t get up again in a hurry.” He held out his hand and noted its tremulousness. “By Jove! I’m weak as a cat.”

Rapidly his brain grew clearer. Ship and sea and sky ceased their momentary whirlings and settled into their proper places. He looked up at the zenith, to which the sun, though still veiled, had indubitably climbed.

“Six hours at least,” he soliloquized. “Heavens, I must have been pounded hard to lie unconscious for that long! If the old tub has floated six hours she may float indefinitely. But——”

He stared curiously around him. As far as his eye could reach stretched the

yellow gulf-weed, blanketing the blue of the sea. So thick was it that it held the Queen comparatively stationary, despite the strong breeze that pressed against her.

Howard uttered a cry of dismay.

"The Sargasso Sea," he groaned. "We're inside it—far inside it. Great Scott!" His brain reeled again. "Where the deuce is Jackson?" he muttered irritably. "And where's that woman?"

Pat to the moment, Jackson thrust his head out of the doorway of the social hall. His dark face was pallid now, and he glared around him wildly. When he saw Howard standing, his expression brightened.

"So you're alive," he rumbled, surlily. "It takes a devil of a lot to kill some people."

Howard stared at the man curiously. It was hardly the way he had expected to be greeted.

"Yes," he answered, slowly, "it takes

a good deal—sometimes. It didn't take much for those poor devils in that boat you wanted to go in. Where's the girl?"

Jackson jerked his hand over his right shoulder.

"She's in there," he responded. Then he hesitated for an instant. "It was a brave thing you did," he finished, grudgingly.

Howard shrugged his shoulders.

"Merely a choice of deaths," he answered. "I expected the ship to sink any minute, and, personally, I preferred to die fighting. How is she?"

"She's breathing, but that's all. She hasn't moved since I got her aboard."

"No wonder. She really hasn't any right to be alive after what she went through. Have you done anything for her?"

"I didn't know what to do. I took her into the social hall and laid her on the sofa and got some whiskey for her, but I couldn't get her to take it, and she looked

so horrible and——” He paused, evidently shaken.

Howard stretched up his hand.

“I must see her,” he declared. “I’m pretty shaky still, but if you’ll give me a lift I’ll try to scramble up beside you and then we’ll see what we can do.” He took the hand that Jackson offered. “Now brace yourself,” he warned. “All set?”

Jackson nodded, and Howard, after an experimental tug or two, put forth all his strength and drew himself up to the other’s side.

“That’s good,” he remarked. “I guess we’re both worth a dozen dead men yet. By the way, how did you get the girl up here?”

Jackson showed more animation than he had yet done.

“The deck wasn’t so steep when I moved her,” he explained. “It tilted worse just as I got her inside. I thought at first we were going down, but we didn’t.”

Howard stepped inside the social hall—which had never before so belied its name—and looked around him. After the bright light of the deck, the room seemed dark, and for a moment he could see nothing. Then he caught a glimpse of something lying on the big athwartship sofa, and scrambled over to it.

A girl lay there in a crumpled heap. In her rich golden brown hair alone was any touch of color. Her eyes were closed and her lips blue. Her cheeks were so bloodless that it seemed impossible that she still lived.

Once she might have been pretty—even beautiful—but the sea had robbed her of all charm, leaving only the pitifulness of youth and womanhood. Howard drew a long breath as he looked at her, and a sudden rage rose within him. She should not die! He had torn her from the sea. She should not die!

Fragmentary ideas as to the proper thing to do came back to him. He bent

down, chafing her wrists and temples; and then, raising her head, touched Jackson's bottle to her lips. A long, shuddering sigh shook the girl's body, and Howard saw a pair of brown eyes open and stare up at him; then close wearily. Again he raised her head. "Drink," he commanded, as he poured the spirit between her parted lips.

As the strangling liquor went down, the eyes flashed open again, and the girl shook from head to foot with a coughing—so violent and so prolonged that Howard feared that he had overdone his task.

But it soon passed, leaving her conscious.

For a moment she lay still, vaguely puzzling over her situation. Then recollection returned with a jerk, and she sat up.

"I remember," she gasped. "Oh, that dreadful wave! To see it come down, down, down—— Where am I?"

“You’re back on the Queen. It’s all right. Try to keep cool. You’ll be better in a moment.”

The wonder grew in the girl’s eyes. “The Queen!” she murmured. “The—Queen! How did I get back?”

“The waves washed you back and we managed to pull you on board. You had better rest a while. You have been unconscious a long time.”

The girl looked from one to the other.

“Thank you! Thank you both,” she murmured. “I can’t find words now, but—the others! Were any of them——?” Her lips moved, but no sound followed.

Howard bowed his head, but he answered unflinchingly—better the clean, sharp cut of certainty than dragging suspense.

“You were the only one in your boat who was saved,” he answered quietly. “I know nothing of the other boats.”

The girl covered her face with her hands. “Oh, poor people!” she moaned.

“Poor, poor people!” Then she dashed the tears from her eyes and dragged herself to her feet, holding fast to the back of the sofa.

“I am Miss Dorothy Fairfax,” she said, with a pretty access of dignity. “And you?” Her eye traveled from one man to the other.

If Howard hesitated, it was for so short a time that it passed unobserved.

“This is Detective Jackson, of the New York police,” he answered steadily, “and I am Frank Howard, his prisoner.”

“Frank Howard! Not—not——”

“Yes.”

“My God!” For the first time in her life, Dorothy Fairfax fainted dead away.

V

As Dorothy fell Howard caught her in his arms and laid her upon the sofa. Then he faced Jackson.

“Nice thing, this!” he remarked, grimly. “A very nice thing, considering the state of affairs. No!” he interjected, as he saw Jackson’s eyes wander to the girl. “Don’t worry about her just now. She’s exhausted, anyway, and she’ll sleep it off and be all the better when she rouses. Meanwhile, there’s work for us. We all need food, and it’s imperative that we should find some at once. Come.”

The angle of the ship’s deck made examination both difficult and dangerous; but when, by the exercise of care, it had been safely carried out, it was evident that the voyagers need not fear either starvation or thirst for a long time to come. The store-rooms of the Queen were above,

though only just above, the new water-line, and in them there was food for months to come.

It was good food, too, intended for the consumption of passengers who paid well. In addition to canned goods, of which the stock was large and varied, there was a quantity of ice and fresh meat, fresh vegetables, flour, biscuits, sauces, breakfast foods, and so forth, to say nothing of wines, liquors, and tobacco.

With water the ship was equally well supplied. Not only was the saloon scuttle-butt full, but, after some search, Howard found two large tanks whose contents had not even been touched. In the pantry, just forward of the saloon, was a refrigerator with cooked food enough for two or three days.

All these things were not found in an instant. As it chanced, the pantry came last; and the moment the cooked food was discovered, further investigation was

promptly suspended and preparations made to comfort the inner man. A plentiful supply was quickly transferred to the big saloon-table, where it was held in place by the fiddles, which had been put on the night before at dinner and had not been removed.

Leaving Jackson to brew the coffee, an art in which he asserted that he was proficient, Howard went to see after Miss Fairfax.

As he had expected, he found her sleeping, her swoon having quietly passed into slumber. A little color had come back to her cheeks and to her lips, and her breathing was regular.

For several moments he stood looking down at her, noting the sweep of her long lashes on her cheeks, the delicate penciling of her eyebrows, and the pure curve of her parted lips. She was of his own class in life and—— He checked his thoughts shortly.

From this girl and all connected with

her he had been cut off by his trial and his sentence. Had it not been for the storm and the wreck, he would never have spoken to one of her kind again.

Suddenly he realized that her eyes were open and that she was regarding him curiously. The next instant she blushed furiously and struggled to her feet. Howard did not offer to help her; he did not dare to.

“Oh!” she begged. “Please forgive me.”

Howard mumbled something indistinct. He was too much surprised to speak clearly. Miss Fairfax, however, did not accept his presumably polite disclaimer.

“No, but really,” she reiterated, “I owe you an apology. It was very silly of me to faint. I was exhausted, and the discovery——”

“The discovery that you were alone at sea with a detective and a convicted murderer appalled you—as well it might. Do not blame yourself, Miss Fairfax, and do

not think that I am sensitive. No man can go through an experience such as mine and fail to have his cuticle thickened. Give yourself no uneasiness about me."

Dorothy began to reply, when suddenly the dinner-gong rang out imperatively.

"What's that?" she gasped.

Howard smiled. "That's Jackson," he explained, "and he's hungry. Will you come to dinner?"

But Dorothy did not come to dinner at once. When she did, ten minutes later, after a visit to her stateroom, which luckily was far aft and consequently above water, Howard noted with amused surprise that in those few minutes she had managed to bind up her tangled hair and change her dress for another. She glanced at the table as she approached and flushed at Jackson's glum looks.

"Oh!" she cried. "Why did you wait? I told you not to." She slipped into her seat. "I'm so hungry!" she sighed.

The hot coffee and the abundant meal lightened the spirits of the trio in spite of the predicament in which they found themselves. With a ship, albeit a crippled one, under their feet and with plenty of food and water at hand, it was not in human nature to despair, especially as the sea had gone down so much that it no longer threatened them.

To both Jackson and Miss Fairfax the worst seemed to be over; in a day or two some one would pick them up, they thought, and all would be well. Howard alone, wiser in the ways of the sea, doubted. He listened to the others' hopeful prognostications, but said little.

"I must study the situation before I can say anything," was as far as he would commit himself, even in answer to a direct question.

When they had finished their meal, Dorothy rose.

"I'll clear away these dishes," she announced. "I'm sure you two have more

important things to attend to. Later, when Mr. Howard has studied the situation, as he wishes, we will hold a council of war.”

Howard bowed and went on deck. His first glance assured him that his worst fears were true. The Queen was evidently far within the Sargasso Sea, and under the impulse of a strong breeze from the west was steadily driving eastward, into ever-thickening fields of weeds.

Wreckage was floating here and there, mute evidence of disasters that had occurred, perhaps close at hand, perhaps thousands of miles away. The passages of open water that had trellised the sea an hour before had disappeared, and with them had gone whatever faint hope Howard might have had of rescue.

No skipper would venture into that tangle; no boat could move through it; almost it seemed that one could walk on it; yet Howard knew that any one trusting to that deceptive firmness would

drown, and drown without even a chance to swim. The weeds would coil round him, soft, slimy, but strong, and drag him down.

Like all who have sailed these waters, Howard had heard many tales of the great Sargasso Sea, and had whiled away many an hour listening to the sailors' yarns of the haven of dead ships buried far within those tangled confines—a haven in the middle of the ocean, a haven without a harbor, a haven where the ships, dropping to pieces at last by slow decay, must sink for two miles or more before they reached the floor of the ocean.

And into this haven the Queen was drifting, slowly but surely. Nothing but sinking could prevent her from moving onward till she reached the innermost haven.

What would it be like? he wondered. Would the wrecks really be crowded together so that one could pass from one to

the other? That there had been plenty of them borne in to make a very continent of ships he did not doubt, but had they floated long enough to accumulate to any great extent?

The sailors declared that the sea was as large as Europe; that the weed was impenetrable over an area larger than France; that there might well be an area of massed wreckage two or three hundred miles in diameter. But these were sailors' tales. Would they prove true?

“Well?”

Howard turned around. Dorothy and Jackson had come up behind him and were staring curiously over the weedy sea. “Well?” reiterated the latter.

Howard hesitated.

“I fear it is not well,” he answered at last. “Our chances of escape for the present seem practically nil.”

Miss Fairfax paled, but Jackson flushed darkly.

“What are you givin’ us?” he de-

manded, roughly. "The ship ain't going to sink, is she?"

"No. That is not the danger. Look around you." He waved his hand to the weed-strewn horizon.

Jackson looked again. "Well! What of it?" he demanded.

"This! You see how thick the weed is—thicker even than it was an hour ago. I've sailed these seas long enough to know what that means. It means that we have been blown a long way inside the Sargasso Sea."

"No ships come here; sailing ships would lose nearly all their speed, and steamers would lose all of it, for their screws would soon be hopelessly fouled. No vessel will come to rescue us. If we are ever to leave the Queen, it must be by our own efforts."

"What can we do?" asked Dorothy, quietly.

"That is it exactly. What *can* we do? Frankly, I don't see that we can do any-

thing at present. We have no boats, and nothing but a boat, and a sharp-edged one at that, could make any way through this morass. And every minute we are getting deeper in. The current below catches our sunken bow, and the wind above catches our uplifted stern, and both sweep us eastward—toward the center of the weed. If we took to a raft we would move much more slowly—but we would starve much more quickly—and our chances of being picked up would not be improved.”

“But what will become of us?”

“I don’t know. It seems likely that we will be swept into the center of the sea, where there are supposed to be thousands of derelicts, the combings of the North Atlantic for four hundred years—I say ‘supposed’ because nobody has ever seen them, but there isn’t much doubt about it.”

Jackson laughed scornfully.

“What are you givin’ us?” he demanded incredulously.

Dorothy turned to him.

“It’s all true,” she corroborated, with a catch in her voice. “Only yesterday Mr. Sprigg told me about it. He was wishing for a chance to explore the place, poor fellow. And now——” She broke off and turned to Howard. “Isn’t there any chance at all of our being picked up?” she asked.

Howard shook his head.

“None, I fear,” he answered, gently. “I am sorry, Miss Fairfax, more sorry than I can say; but I fear we shall be on this wreck or on another for weeks and months to come. So far as I can see now we can do nothing till we reach the central wreckage. There we may find a boat or the tools to build one—ours are far under water—or some other way to escape.”

“It will be desperately hard to wait; to drift deeper and deeper into this tangle day after day, hoping that things will change when they come to the worst; but

it's all we can do. Meanwhile we can thank God that we have food, drink, and comfortable shelter, and we are on our way to see what no one has ever seen before and returned to tell it. Let's make the best of it."

"The best of it!" Jackson's face was flushed and his eyes distended. "The best of it!" he vociferated. "By Heaven, it's well for you to yap! You're all right here. You're safe from the electric chair here. You can afford to wait and wait. But how about us? How about me? How about my wife and children?"

"It's hard," Howard assented. "It's bitter hard, but——"

"Bah! You're lying to us! You're a sailor and can get us out of this, if you will. You don't want to get out. You hope that you'll get a chance to escape, but, by Heaven, you shan't! I'll kill you first! By God, I will!"

"It's your duty to do so!" Howard

spoke quietly, but a spot of red glowed on each cheek. "It is your duty to kill me rather than let me escape. But it is not your duty to insult me. I permit no man to do that, and I warn you not to repeat your offense.

"For the rest, Miss Fairfax, there is some reason in what this man says. The catastrophe which has brought death to so many, and suffering, both past and future, to you, has saved me. I am safe from the electric chair. Anywhere else in the wide world I would have to shrink from every casual glance; would have to lie in answer to every wanton question. But no extradition runs to the heart of the Sargasso Sea. So it might seem natural that I should wish to stay here. In so far, our excitable friend is right. But I give you my word of honor, not as a jailbird, but as the gentleman I once was, that I am even more anxious to get out of here than yourself. I have still a task to do in the world; my view is not

entirely bounded by the electric chair. If any faintest chance offers for us to escape, be sure that I will seize it. But I am helpless until we reach the central wrecks and see what aid they have to offer. Then I will do what a man may.”

“I do not promise to go on to New York with Jackson, but I do promise to get you and him safely out of this place, if it is within my power to do so—and I believe it will be. Say that you believe me.”

It was impossible not to believe this clear-eyed, straight-spoken gentleman, convicted murderer though he were. Dorothy held out her hand.

“I believe you,” she said, “and I trust you.”

Howard looked at the hand doubtfully.

“That is not nominated in the bond,” he suggested.

“Then we’ll put it in,” returned the girl. “As for what you have done in the past—I have forgotten it. We will all forget it—till then.”

“So be it—till then!”

The hands of the two met. But Jackson, standing aside, grunted scornfully.

“I’ll not forget it,” he growled.. “Not for a single minute; not till I get you to New York. I’ve known your smooth-spoken sort before.”

VI

Two weeks passed without change in the situation, except that their end saw the Queen still deeper in the tangle. The breeze from the west had continued, but day by day had grown fainter, until at last it barely cooled the faces of the weary passengers. Day by day, too, the weed and the wreckage in the tangle grew thicker. Here and there floated broken spars, fragments of shattered deck-houses, moss-grown planks, Jacob's-ladders, and all the fugitive spoil of the sea. Broken boats, bottom upward; rafts with tumbled fragments of canvas screening perhaps some terrible burden; a red buoy wrenched from some coast harbor; a bottle with a little flag bobbing above it—these appeared, grew nearer, and dropped astern, sometimes just out of reach of the Queen.

Several times abandoned ships appeared; one with a patch of sail gave Jackson some agonizing alternations of hope and despair before its final nearness forced him to admit that it, like their own vessel, was a derelict, bound for the port of dead ships. None of this wreckage, however, kept pace with the Queen. The tallest caught the wind and the deepest caught the current, but the Queen caught both, and moved ahead accordingly.

The marvel of it all affected the voyagers according to their several natures. Jackson took it hardest. Used to the roar of New York and to the electric contagion of great crowds, and without resources within himself, the comparative solitude and the uncertainty drove him frantic. Had he been alone, he would never have lived so long; despair would have robbed him of his wits altogether and have driven him to end it all by a plunge over the side. Even as it was, his state caused his companions grave alarm.

Howard took care never to let him be very long out of his sight by day. Fortunately, he slept like a log at night, and Howard was able to lock him in his room late and release him early without his ever discovering that he had been confined.

This state of affairs, however, could not continue. Day by day the detective grew more and more surly, until Howard began to long for the open conflict that was sure to come. Had they two been alone together, he would have speedily brought affairs to a crisis, but the misery of Dorothy's position should anything happen to himself made him hold off, hoping that Jackson's mood might pass. The worst of it all was the man had a revolver—the only one on board.

For the rest, Howard seemed to be not at all troubled. In fact, so far as Jackson knew, the situation worried him not at all. Only Dorothy, who, light-footed, had once come upon him unheard and found him

on his knees with bowed head and shaking shoulders, suspected that his light-heartedness was assumed. On that occasion she had stolen away as silently as she had come.

As a matter of fact, Howard, though wild to get back to the task of which he had spoken to the others, was yet not anxious to go to execution. Moreover, the wonder of the situation appealed to him mightily, and he tried to be content to grasp the hours as they came, and not to worry over the future. After he had thoroughly explored the reachable portions of the vessel and had worked out their position as well as it was possible with such makeshift instruments as he could devise, he had devoted himself to the study of the myriad life that swarmed among the weeds. A scoop, trailed overboard for a few minutes, invariably brought aboard hundreds of living forms.

Something of a naturalist already, he took delight in studying the sea creatures,

and in noting the marvellous protective resemblances by which they hid from foes or crept upon enemies, themselves similarly equipped.

In this study he was enthusiastically joined by Dorothy. No past record of crime could prevent the intimacy that sprang up between these two, so like in tastes and training, thus thrown upon each other for human companionship. Again and again Dorothy told herself that she ought to shrink from Howard and confine their intercourse to the needs of bare civility, and, accordingly, for a time she would devote herself to Jackson and let Howard go. But Jackson, blameless police-officer as he was, had no resources within himself to long content an educated girl like Dorothy, and soon she would drift back to Howard's side--much, it must be owned, to Jackson's relief.

Curiously enough, the girl was not unhappy. The situation, as yet, was too novel for that. The fact that she could

see no possible means for rescue did not greatly trouble her. With the natural resilience of youth, she threw off her anxiety; with the natural trust of woman in man, she was content to leave everything to Howard, and to put implicit faith in his promise, vague and unsubstantial though it was, to do what he could to save her. This was the more surprising as he had as yet had no chance to prove himself capable. Nevertheless, Dorothy threw all responsibility on his shoulders and concerned herself no more about the outcome. If sometimes uneasy questions assailed her, she drove them away. There was nothing to do but to trust him. After she had attended to the meals—a duty which she insisted upon taking on herself after the first day—she would join him at his nets, and together they would pass away the hours. They grew very friendly in those days, especially in the long silences of sympathetic understanding that ever bind heart to heart.

One day, the fifteenth since the storm,

after one of these silences, Dorothy turned to the man impulsively. "Mr. Howard," she exploded. "You say you are not thin-skinned. Won't you tell me something about your case?"

Howard flushed. "To what end, Miss Fairfax?" he asked quietly. "I can say that I am innocent, of course; but that is what every convict in the land says. I could not convince the jury. Is it not better that I keep silence till I can get the proof?"

"Nevertheless, tell me."

"Certainly; if you really wish it." Howard's tones were coolly impersonal. "On May 8 of last year, I received a letter in a woman's writing. It was short and I remember every word of it. 'Dear Frank,' it said, 'I am here. Come to see me at once. Dolores.' Then followed the address. Perhaps I was foolish to go, but I did go—to a cheap lodging-house, where the landlady told me to 'go right up' to the third floor and knock on the door

marked 8. The door was ajar, however, and as I got no answer to my knock, I pushed it open and looked in. A woman's body was lying on the floor. Again I was foolish. I should have summoned aid at once. Instead, I went in, and stooped over the body. Immediately I saw that the woman was dead; strangled apparently. As I rose to call for help, the landlady appeared at the door. Probably the inference she drew was justified; at any rate, she tried to blackmail me, and when I refused to submit she shrieked and summoned assistance. She declared that she had seen me choking the woman, and I was arrested. Later it developed that some one passing under my name had married the girl—for she was nothing more—in a little village near San Juan at the very time my ship was stationed there."

"That, of course, furnished the motive for the crime. I had, so it was charged, married the girl and deserted her. Later,

when she followed me to New York, I had sought her out and murdered her. There were plenty of people to swear to the marriage and to send in affidavits identifying my photograph as that of the bridegroom—though, as it seems, none of them had seen very much of him. Only the minister who performed the ceremony was doubtful, and him my lawyers arranged to bring to New York. He started, but his ship was wrecked and he was drowned on the way. All I could say was that I had never seen the girl until I looked on her dead body, and that went for little.”

“Evidently, the girl thought that she had married Frank Howard. Perhaps she did marry a Frank Howard; the name is not uncommon. Perhaps she married some one deliberately masquerading under my name. I do not know. At all events, the case was complete against me, and the jury found me guilty without leaving their seats. I escaped and went

to Porto Rico to look for evidence, but I was captured before I could find it. That is all, Miss Fairfax. I cannot blame you if you agree with the jury."

"But I don't——"

The sentence was never finished. Jackson, who for two hours had been standing by the rail, staring northward, suddenly whirled around and came toward the two, pistol in hand.

"Put your fists up," he ordered Howard tensely. "Up! Quick! Hang you!"

Taken by surprise, Howard could do nothing but obey.

Jackson laughed madly. "You've run things just about long enough," he grated. "We've been driftin' in this wreck for two weeks now and I'm dog tired of it. I ain't no sailor, but I know when a man's givin' me the double cross, and you're doin' it. You've got to get us out of this."

Howard's face grew dark. "Kindly specify?" he said.

The other glared at him. "Don't you try to bluff me with your big words," he shouted. "I won't have it. You've been lettin' on that you wanted to get us out of this and all the time you've been lettin' us drift deeper in. You don't want us to get away at all, for all your smooth talk."

"I told you that I was helpless until we reached the central mass of wrecks and——"

"Yah! You and your mass of wrecks! I ain't no come-on. You can't work no con game on me. I never took no stock in those fairy tales, but I thought I'd let you play your game out. Now I'm tired of it, and it's up to you to do something quick!"

Howard shrugged his shoulders. "With pleasure," he agreed, "if you'll kindly tell me what to do."

"How do I know? I ain't no sailor. You are! And you're going straight back to your state-room and stay there till you study out some plan to get us out

of this. You belong in quod, anyway, and you're going to stay there—with the bracelets on, too, until you get us out of this. March, now."

But Howard shook his head. "I'll never wear irons again," he declared. "Never! You're armed and I'm not. You can kill me, but you can't jail me. Make up your mind to that. As for the central mass of wrecks, it must exist; it's impossible that it should not exist. The only question is as to the area it covers. If you can—— By Jove!"

His eyes left the detective's face and travelled into space. "Fool," he cried, "look yonder."

Jackson laughed scornfully. "Not good enough," he cried. "You can't fool——"

But Dorothy broke in. "Land! Land!" she cried.

In spite of himself the detective looked around. Through the haze before them loomed what seemed to be the bulk of an island, set with lofty tiers and dark

beaches on which white houses gleamed in the setting sun. So real it seemed that the happy tears streamed from Dorothy's eyes. "Oh!" she sobbed, "it's land! land! land!"

Howard's voice came to her from afar off. "No," he murmured, sadly. "It is not land. It is wreckage. We have reached our destination."

Moved by a slight breeze, the haze shredded away and there, on the waters before them, stretching away to right and to left, lay an interminable mass of wrecks of every shape and description, banked together so thickly that they seemed to touch—and did touch—each other. Dead! all of them. Some newly dead; others long dead; but all unburied, waiting in the haven of dead ships for the long-deferred end. The trees were not trees, but masts hung with ravelled cordage; the beaches were the black hulls of ships; and the white houses were deck-houses or patches of canvas.

For a moment no one spoke. Dorothy stood staring, every muscle tense, while the tears dripped slowly from her distended eyes. Jackson's mouth fell open; his pistol hand fell nerveless to his side. For the first time he realized the situation.

As they gazed, the sun with tropic suddenness dropped below the horizon and hid the scene.

Howard's voice broke the silence. "Now," he encouraged, "we can get to work."

VII

It was late that night before the voyagers dropped into uneasy slumber. The wonder of their situation, suddenly brought home to them, had roused them all to unusual volubility. In the excitement consequent on the discovery of the massed wrecks even Jackson forgot his suspicions, and the three talked together freely. Howard had promised that they should join the wrecks, and they had done so. Now he would have a chance to keep his other promise to get them out; in the first flush of arrival they did not doubt that he would do so.

But Jackson, at least, changed his opinion the next morning when he came on deck and viewed the scene before him.

During the night the Queen, drawn by the same natural attraction that holds the planets in their sphere and brings float-

ing chips together in a basin, had taken its place with the dead ships. Under her counter lay a water-logged schooner; beside her rubbed a dismasted sailing ship; over her submerged bow hung a tramp steamer, whose blackened masts, bare of cordage, gave evidence of the flames that had ravaged her. Beyond, stretched a mass of wreckage, ship pressing upon ship, in an endless iteration of ruin. Only to the west the view was open, and there stretched the weed in slimy convolutions.

Over all screamed the sea-birds.

Each of these countless wrecks had once sailed the sea, new and strong, and each had come here at last to slumber peacefully until the deep should open and receive it. No more would they ride out the hurricane or take with frolic welcome the buffetings of the waves; no more would they visit the great ports of men and groan beneath the heavy cargoes placed upon them. Their days of turmoil were over. Here, in this quiet haven, in

the great calm of the tropics, with only the faintest breezes to whisper into their ears tales of the open sea, and with the birds to nest in their deserted rigging, they dreamed their old age away.

To Dorothy the sight was solemn, but not sad; to Howard it was amazing; to Jackson it was maddening.

Less than ever did he believe that he was hopelessly trapped far out on the ocean; more than ever was he convinced that Howard was deceiving him for his own ends. He saw the ships rocking gently on the swells, noted white patches of sails showing here and there, heard the cries of the gulls, and told himself afresh that he could easily walk ashore if he only knew how; and when a flock of parrots lighted in the rigging and demanded crackers, and a monkey poised on the end of a near-by mast and gibbered, he was convinced beyond peradventure that Howard had lied to them and was only watching his chance to desert them. He

did not even listen to that officer when he explained that both birds and beasts must have drifted in on wrecks and had probably thriven.

“The birds will feed on the roaches on the old rattle-trap wrecks,” he explained, “and the monkeys will live on the birds’ eggs. Perhaps, too, both catch shell-fish in the weeds.”

Breakfast was a silent meal. Dorothy was awed and frightened by the sight of the wrecks, and Jackson was glum. In vain Howard strove to rouse them. Finally he gave up and finished his breakfast in silence. Then he pushed away his plate.

“Listen to me, please,” he said coldly. “We have arrived at our destination and must now take steps to help ourselves. Two things are necessary: first, to explore the ships around us; second, not to get lost. Make no mistake; the danger of this last is very great. These ships will **not** look the same as we leave them and

as we return to them; where we climb down a ship's side in going away, we must climb up it in coming back, and *vice versa*. Often this may be difficult; sometimes it may be impossible. Yet, if we try to vary our route, we may lose ourselves; and once lost the chances are a thousand to one against our ever finding our way back to the Queen again. Not that we shall stay by the Queen long; probably we shall soon find some ship better suited for a base of operations. But we must remember that this continent of ships is a desert except around its edges. New wrecks arriving will bring food and water, but a few hundred yards inside the borders neither can remain. It may seem to you that it would be easy to get back to the border again, but I assure you that it would not be. Without a compass, we would not know which way to go, and might easily be plunging deeper and deeper into the mass."

He paused, waiting for comment, but none was made. He was leader, however grudgingly so, and it was for him to map out their course of action. No one dreamed of disputing it—Jackson, no less than Dorothy, realized his helplessness and his ignorance.

“I beg you, therefore, to be very careful,” resumed Howard, seeing that the others waited. “I am particularly insistent, because we must explore first of all. To-day the danger is not great, because we are not likely to get far away, but we might as well start right. First, we must run up all the signal-flags we can find; they will be conspicuous for a long ways off. Next, we must light a fire in the galley range; its smoke will be visible still farther away. Third, we must never go out of sight of our base—the Queen, at present—under any circumstances; when we climb to each new ship we must look back and make sure that we can still see the flags or the smoke. Fourth, we

must each carry a hatchet and mark our way just as a woodman blazes a path through a forest; the hatchet will come in handy, anyhow. Later, if we do not find what we want, we can shift our base to some other vessel along the 'coast,' and explore farther with that as a new center. Do I make myself clear?"

Dorothy nodded. "Shall we all go together?" she asked.

Howard shook his head. "No, I think not," he answered gently. "I hope you will be willing to stay here for the present and keep the galley fire alight; I'll show you how to make it smoke. Jackson and I will do the exploring for to-day, anyway. He can go to the north along the coast, and I will go to the south, and——"

"Not much!" The policeman was shaking his head doggedly. "Not much, you don't. I don't leave you out of my sight. I've got my orders from headquarters and——"

Howard stifled an exclamation. "Very well," he said coldly. "As you please! Perhaps it is better anyway. Two can do things that one could not. Come! Let's get ready."

"But——" Dorothy looked very dubious.

Howard turned to her. "I know what you would say, Miss Fairfax. You would like to go, of course. But, believe me, it is best not. Moving about these wrecks will be difficult and even dangerous for any one hampered by skirts. You would be exhausted very soon. Besides, we may meet unpleasant sights. Later, when we know our ground better, we will take you for a sight-seeing tour. You will be perfectly safe on the Queen. You are not afraid to be left alone, are you?"

"Oh! No! It will be lonely, of course, but isn't there some way that I can signal to you if anything should happen?"

Howard considered a while; then plunged down into the vitals of the Queen,

returning shortly with a double armful of straw dug from a hogshead once filled with crockery.

“There,” he said, dropping it at the entrance of the galley. “If anything happens, wet some of that and put it on the fire; it will make a thick black smoke. By alternately closing and opening the draft, you can let it go up and cut it off altogether. We’ll watch for it.”

Howard and Jackson climbed down the Jacob’s-ladder that still swung at the Queen’s counter, and dropped lightly to the deck of the water-logged schooner that lay there. Of this, nothing but a few inches of the deck and the stumps of the masts were above water; whatever deck-houses there might have been had been carried away, together with the entire rail. Consequently there was nothing to investigate, nothing that could help the castaways in their efforts to escape, and the two men crossed over her with merely a glance, using her as a bridge to

reach a ship floating high in the water just beyond.

The second vessel had a gangway lowered down her side, evidently to help her passengers to reach the boats. Her masts were gone, but otherwise she seemed intact.

“Crew and passengers taken off by another ship,” explained Howard, “probably in fair weather after a storm. Most likely another storm was brewing and the crew expected their own vessel to sink.”

A rapid search showed that the ship had nothing of value to offer. Her boats were gone; her compasses, charts, chronometers, and sextants all were gone. Some tools remained, but were so rusted as to be of little value. Howard soon led the way to her taffrail, whence he could clutch the shrouds of a full-rigged ship which had evidently been in a collision.

As he stepped on the deck of this craft, there was a scurry of feet, and a dozen huge rats bolted across the deck and disappeared under the poop.

“Confound the brutes,” he muttered. “I hate them! Wonder what they have been eating.”

The answer was not far to seek. Close beside the davits of the quarter-boat lay two skeletons; one with a smooth, round hole drilled through the fleshless skull, the other with a broken backbone. Howard looked at them and nodded.

“Probably the crew made a rush for the boats,” he suggested. “Somebody—one of the officers, I suppose—tried to stop them. He shot one, but the others ran over him and broke his back. Then came the rats. Well, it was a man’s death. If you can find a couple of bags, Jackson, we will commit the bones to the sea.”

From the ship the two men descended to a steamer, much down by the stern, with a gaping hole in her port counter, where something must have driven deep into her vitals. From this they climbed upon a small yacht, floating just awash.

(“Held up by water-tight compartments,” explained Howard.) Thence they passed to another vessel, and to another, and another, each bearing mute record to the manner of its ruin.

But on none did the explorers find what they sought. The boats were invariably gone; the tools were always rusty; the compasses had all been snatched from the binnacle and from the cabin; the charts had mostly been torn from the racks and tables, often so roughly that the thumb-tacks that had held their corners were left in the board, each holding a triangular scrap of torn paper. In the few instances where any did remain, they were rotten with mildew, and charted regions far distant from the Sargasso Sea.

It was noon when Howard gave the word to return to the Queen. “Don’t be downcast, Jackson,” he consoled. “What we have found to-day is only what we had to expect. The boats would, of course, be taken, even if everything else

was left. The compasses, and charts, and sextants, and so on, would naturally be taken next, for those who went in the boats would need them to shape their course. The tools and engines would have almost invariably been left exposed to the weather and would be badly rusted. It would have been by mere chance had we found what we wanted on the very first day. At least we have learned that there is plenty of food and water and clothing and coal to be had for the taking. Tomorrow we will search in another direction. Now, let's go home."

But return was not so easy as the two men expected. As Howard had foretold, there was an important difference between climbing up and climbing down, and this difference was accentuated by the fact that in leaving the Queen they had chosen the easiest route. When they could have gone from one ship to any one of two or three others, they had naturally moved to the one that appeared the least difficult of access.

Taking the route in reverse, this small detail of choice often meant that they must return to the one that was the most difficult to board.

To this expected obstacle was added another that was unexpected. In more than one instance they found that their morning route, as shown by their blazed marks, was absolutely impracticable. The ships had moved, slightly perhaps, but yet enough to bar their passage, ten feet of water being often as impassable as ten hundred. Howard struck his brow with his hand when he realized this.

“I was a fool not to foresee this!” he exclaimed. “Of course, these ships are not absolutely stationary. Even far inside they must be somewhat subject to currents and to winds, and must move slightly, while here, on the outskirts, they must move considerably. As a matter of fact, the whole mass must be swinging around and around in a vast circle, moved by the same current that brought them

here in the first place. Well, we must simply abandon our blazes, and go home by the flags and the smoke."

Jackson peered into the distance. "I can't see no flags," he objected.

"Can't you? I can, but they are undoubtedly hard to make out in this mass of frayed cordage and flapping streamers. However, we can see the smoke clearly enough, and must set our course by it."

Ten minutes later the first accident of the day occurred. In stepping from one ship to another, Jackson missed his footing, caught wildly at a ratline, which broke in his grasp, and shot downward with a yell into the water.

By the time he had risen to the surface, Howard, who had been a little in advance, was back, peering down at him.

"Can you climb out?" he demanded. "No! I guess you can't without help. Hook your fingers into that port-hole—there, just behind you. That's right! Can you hang on for a while? It may

take some time to find a rope sound enough to bear your weight."

Jackson clawed the weed from off his face. "Yes! I can hang on all right," he returned, savagely. Evidently his involuntary bath had ruffled his temper. "I can swim, too," he added.

Howard disappeared, and the policeman settled himself to wait. He had learned to swim in the North River, and had no difficulty in keeping afloat, even without the adventitious aid of the bull's-eye in the steamer's side just above him. If he had fallen in almost anywhere else he could have gotten out himself, but, as it chanced, this particular bit of water was shut in by the sides of three ships, none of which offered a foothold by which to climb. The bull's-eye by which he hung was the only orifice that broke the smoothness of the overhanging sides.

Time passed, however, and Howard did not return, and a vague uneasiness began to work in the policeman's mind.

There were ropes everywhere. Surely, it did not take so long to find one. He called, but received no answer. Could Howard have lost the place? Or could some accident have befallen him? Or, could—good God! Did the man mean to leave him to drown?

The suggestion, once offered, would not down. It was, he told himself, the very thing to be expected. With him out of the way, Howard would be freed from the shadow of the gallows. He alone—except Miss Fairfax, and what was a girl's life—he alone knew that Howard had survived the wreck of the *Queen*. With him dead, Howard—supposing that he could regain dry land—could live out his life in safety. And what was a policeman's life to one whose hands were already stained with the blood of his own wife?

Jackson drew a long breath as conviction forced itself upon him. It was characteristic of the man that he did not

whimper. He had been dealing with criminals for twenty years, and conceded them the right to fight for their own hand. He had always declared that he would take his dose when it came without doing the baby act; and, by George, he would keep his word.

Hope had vanished when Howard reappeared. In his hand was a boat's tackle, which he proceeded to hitch to a davit that projected over Jackson's head. But, instead of dropping down the other end, he quietly seated himself on the bulwarks and stared thoughtfully at the man below.

"Well, Jackson," he remarked, deliberately, "our positions seem to be reversed."

The policeman scowled. "Damn you, yes," he responded, truculently.

An expression of admiration floated over Howard's face. "By Jove, Jackson!" he cried. "You're all right. I didn't think you had the nerve to speak

up like that under the circumstances. 'What dam of lances brought you forth to jest at the dawn with death?' That's from Kipling, Jackson, if you do not recognize it."

"G'wan. If you're goin' to murder me, do it. You've had experience, all right."

"Fie! fie! Jackson! Call things by their proper names. This wouldn't be any murder. But, there"—Howard's voice grew stern—"enough of this. I see you realize the situation. All I have to do is to leave you where you are, and to-morrow I will be a free man. But I am not going to do it; I am going to pull you up in a minute. But I want you to realize that I have deliberately put aside the best chance possible to free myself from your surveillance, and I want you to cease dogging my footsteps and watching me everywhere I go. I don't ask you to let me escape or anything like that, but I do ask you to act on my suggestions

without any talk of not letting me out of your sight. Our escape from this wreckage may any day depend on your prompt obedience, and I want you to obey. In return, I reiterate my assertion—which you did not believe—that I am even more anxious than you are to get back to dry land; and in addition I promise you, on the word of an officer and a gentleman, that if I do get back, you and Miss Fairfax shall go, too. I will not desert you, even though I know you will arrest me the moment you have force enough at hand to do it. Now, put your foot in the hook on this block, and I'll haul you up."

Jackson caught the block that Howard dropped, and put his foot in it mechanically. He was a slow thinker, and Howard's words bewildered him for the moment; later he would realize their import. Anyhow, now was the time to act; the time to think would come later. So he grasped the rope and waited while his former prisoner hoisted him up to the deck.

Once there he turned to Howard and opened his mouth. But that individual checked him with a smile.

“After a while! After a while!” he counselled. “Let’s get back to the Queen now. Where’s that smoke?”

He turned and gazed around the horizon; then he started.

“Something’s wrong on the Queen,” he cried. “Miss Fairfax is signalling for us!”

VIII

WHEN the two men left Dorothy alone in the Queen, she was not uneasy, although she did not welcome being alone in that desolate place. She had so grown to depend on Howard's companionship, and to take comfort even in Jackson's bear-like presence about the ship, that she felt a queer sinking at heart when they left her. Still, she realized that it was necessary that some one who understood thoroughly what was wanted should explore, and she knew that Howard was the only one possessed of that information. If Jackson felt it his duty to go along, she would not for worlds ask him to stay with her, although she was entirely convinced that Howard would not desert them. She had accepted without reservation Howard's story of the crime for

which he had been tried, and she put implicit trust in him.

The fire in the galley was burning well when the two men left, and Dorothy decided to postpone her dishwashing and tidying up, and to remain on deck and watch their progress. Several times before the tangled masts and hulls, torn canvas, and frayed cordage hid them from her view, Howard turned to wave his hand to her and shake his head in token that the search had as yet brought them nothing. When they disappeared at last behind a big, high-floating steamer, she went below to attend to her duties, which included the preparation of what she told herself should be an extra fine dinner, in celebration of the completion of the first stage of their journey.

Time passed rapidly in accompaniment to the cheerful clink of the pans and the rattle of the dishes with which she set the table. At last she paused and looked at her watch.

“Twelve o’clock,” she murmured. “He ought to be coming back now.” It was noticeable that she said “he,” not “they.” “I’ll go on deck and look.”

She started up the companionway, then paused, as a faint shout was borne to her ears. “There they are now,” she thought, happily. “I wonder what they have found.” She hurried up the stairway.

The call was repeated as she went, and was unmistakable now. “Ahoy, the ship!” it came again and again.

Dorothy stopped short. “That’s not Mr. Howard’s voice—nor Mr. Jackson’s,” she gasped. “Who——”

Cautiously she peered from the door and looked around anxiously. Two unknown sailors were standing on the deck of the fire-blackened steamer that lay across the bows of the Queen. As she stared, one of them hailed again. “Ahoy, the steamer!” he shouted.

Dorothy’s first feeling was one of de-

light. There were people then in this place of desolation, and people, to Dorothy, meant civilization and all that it connotes—including facilities of communication with the world. She was about to answer the hail when something made her hesitate. It might be all right, but she was alone. She turned, and, slipping back to the galley fire, rapidly thrust into it an armful of wet straw. An exclamation outside, faintly heard, showed that the smoke had changed accordingly. Twice she repeated the signal with an interval between; then warned by the thump of feet on the deck overhead, she thrust in a last armful and hurried toward the companionway.

As she reached its top, the sailors appeared at the door. Dorothy bowed.

“Good morning, gentlemen!” she cried.

The men started back with one accord; their hands flew to their caps and pulled them from their heads. One seemed too amazed for speech, but the other was somewhat bolder.

“Beggin’ your pardon, ma’am,” he stammered. “I—we—Bill an’ me hailed, but—I hopes you’re well, ma’am.”

Dorothy smiled. “Yes! I’m well,” she returned, “and very glad to see you. Tell me, do you live here?”

“On this ship, ma’am? No, ma’am.”

“Oh, no, I know you don’t live on this ship, for we have just drifted in on it. I mean here.”

She waved her hand comprehensively.

Bill had recovered somewhat by now. “No, ma’am,” he declared positively. “Joe and me live in little old New York. But we’ve been here ten years!”

“Ten years!” Dorothy’s cheeks paled. “Ten years! Oh! can’t you get away? Don’t tell me you can’t get away!”

“No, ma’am, we can’t get away. We’d go like a shot if we could. You see, ma’am, nothing but wrecks ever come in here, and there ain’t no way of getting out.”

“Can’t you build a boat?”

“We might, ma’am, but how could we get it through the weed. Nobody ever has. Everybody who’s ever come in here is here yet.”

“Everybody! How many are there of you?”

“Twenty-two—not countin’ the women and the child.”

“Women! Are there women here? I’m so glad! Oh! poor creatures! Have they—But, there! Come up here and sit down. We drifted in here only yesterday—three of us. The men have gone to explore, but they will be back soon. While we are waiting for them, you must tell me all about everything.”

Dorothy led the way aft, reaching the taffrail just in time to see Howard and Jackson speeding toward her over the wrecks. She waved her hand at them; assured of their safety she felt more secure.

“There comes the rest of our party,” she explained.

The story told by Bill and Joe over the dinner-table was long and involved with many interruptions and many repetitions. According to them, there had always been people living on the assembled wreckage. The one of their number who had been there longest—for twenty-five years—knew personally others before him who had been there for as long again, and declared that these in turn knew of still others who had been there before them. It seemed very probable that the colony—if such a name could be applied to it—had existed for centuries.

The people, like the ships, had always come and never gone; once on the wrecks, they had stayed there till they died. Several of those now there had been born on the wrecks, and had lived there all their lives. Fresh wrecks brought them food, water, clothing, and many luxuries, and if these failed, there were abundant rain, birds' eggs, and fish to fall back upon. Mostly sailors, trained to handi-

ness, the castaways had developed many lines of industry, and, on the whole, lived very contentedly.

“Some of us is willing to live here always,” said Joe, “an’ some ain’t—especially at first. But, Lord love ye, they comes round to it after a while, seein’ they’ve got to.”

The castaways, it seemed, had developed a sort of government, under a former ship captain named Peter Forbes, whose ascendancy rested partly on the fact that his strength enabled him to overcome everyone who contested the leadership with him, and partly on his native ability. Under his rule, stores were collected from the newly arrived ships and carried, sometimes from miles away, to what may be called the village—the central point where the castaways lived. A patrol—Joe and Bill, at present—was maintained, which made regular trips for fifty miles in each direction, investigating such new wrecks as might

come in. The patrol only went as far as fifty miles in order to pick up any new arrivals, it being impracticable to transport stores more than a few miles over the ragged surface of the wreckage, even by swinging them on an aerial trolley from mast to mast.

Forbes divided up the work, and saw that each individual did his share. He also acted as a fount of justice, settling disputes in a rough-and-ready fashion, and, on occasion, dealing out punishments, more or less severe, for infractions of the rules he had laid down. Altogether, he seemed such an exceptional sort of man that Howard could not understand why he had made no effort to escape to shore.

Bill tried to make things clear. "You see, sir," he explained, "it's like this: This here weed stretches out for two hundred miles and more. We'd first have to build a boat, and then cut our way through it inch by inch. We couldn't get

grub or water enough in the boat to last us till we got out. An' if we did get out, where'd we be? At sea without a compass or nothin'! We all wanted to try at first, but Forbes, he explains things to us so plain that we sees how impossible it is. Two or three times coves have tried to get out, but they allus got stuck in the weed, an' mighty glad they was to get back to where there was plenty to eat and drink."

Howard nodded. "I see the difficulty," he conceded. "But have you no instruments? Of course there are not likely to be many, but I should think you would have found a few in all these years."

Joe hesitated. "The cap'n allers looks out for them things," he declared at last. "Nobody knows how to use 'em but him."

"Ah! I see."

To himself Howard added that it was tolerably evident that Forbes was not over-anxious to escape; probably he

agreed with Cæsar that he "would rather be first in a little Iberian village than second in Rome"; and, contented with his little realm and sway, threw his influence against any attempt of the others to deplete it. Howard felt that he and Forbes might come to a clash later on.

Dorothy changed the subject by asking about the women. There were two, it appeared, one old and one young. The older one, of whom the sailors spoke affectionately as Mother Joyce, was nearly sixty years old; she and her husband had been on the wrecks for fifteen years. The younger had been there only two years; she had been a widow, but had married one Gallegher, Forbes's right-hand man, some time before. The only child in the community was hers.

"So you marry here, just as you do elsewhere?" interjected Dorothy, lightly, at this point. "Who performs the ceremonies?"

Joe hesitated. "Cap'n Forbes used to

up to last year” he answered at last. “Then Mr. Willoughby floated in on a wreck. He’s a regular gospel sharp, an’ he’s done it since.”

“Gallegher ain’t pretty,” continued Joe, thoughtfully. “An’ I guess Mrs. Strother that was wasn’t overanxious to marry him. But women is awful skearce here, and they generally gits married right off.” He paused and looked from Dorothy to Howard. “Your wife, sir?” he questioned.

Dorothy flushed hotly, but Howard did not seem to notice it.

“No,” he said. “This is Miss Fairfax. I am Lieutenant Howard, of the navy. This is Mr. Jackson, of the New York police force.”

The men ducked their heads awkwardly. “We did have another lady here,” remarked Bill, abstractedly. “She was the cap’n’s wife, but she died a month or two ago. The cap’n is mighty anxious to marry again—mighty anxious.”

“Ah! indeed.” Howard rose from the table. “Come,” he continued, “let’s go on deck. I want you to point out something to me!”

As Dorothy led the way, followed by Bill and Joe, Howard turned to Jackson, who had been listening to the sailors in dazed silence.

“If you want to get away from here, Jackson,” he counselled hurriedly, “for God’s sake keep quiet about me. If you don’t, Forbes is likely to keep us here for the rest of our lives. The chances are he will try to do it anyway.”

IX

SHORTLY after dinner the entire party set out for the village, which was, it seemed, only half a mile away, and would have been reached by Jackson and Howard had they chanced to go in the right direction.

Bill and Joe knew all the easiest routes across the wreckage, and led the newcomers by one, which, though not quite direct, yet involved the minimum of effort on Dorothy's part. Nevertheless, progress was necessarily slow, and it took nearly an hour to go the so-called half mile.

When the village was sighted, it was evident that considerable pains had been taken to make it comfortable. A score of modern vessels, mostly steamers, of about the same phase of flotation had been pulled into place and so bound together

as to constitute a solid mass. Over what had once been the interstices between them, planking had been laid, making it possible to go anywhere about the place without difficulty. Awnings, spread from mast to mast, gave promise of cool shade.

“The cap’n fixed this up about a year after he came,” explained Bill to Howard. “Before then we just pigged around any which-a-ways. But he says that what with new ships drifting in continual, we’re gettin’ too far from the coast and we’ll have to move soon. Yonder he is, sir.”

As Bill spoke, a tall, thickset man came hurriedly on deck, ran to the edge of the platform, cast a quick glance at the newcomers as they scrambled over the wreckage toward him, and then turned and beat a rapid tattoo on a ship’s bell that hung close at hand.

“That’s the signal that something’s doing,” explained Joe.

The village awoke to life. Half a dozen

hatchways gave out figures in every style of costume, and when the newcomers reached the deck, practically the entire population was waiting to welcome them.

Forbes was first, the rest holding back respectfully to give him precedence.

“Welcome! Welcome!” he called, holding out both hands. “Seldom indeed has any one been so welcome. And a special welcome to you, fair lady,” he added, as he bent low over Dorothy’s slender fingers. Then he turned to the villagers behind him. “Come, all of you,” he commanded. “Come and make our new friends feel at home.”

They came, all of them, crowding round the newcomers with a babble of greetings and questionings as to the world from which they had been so long cut off. So rapid was the fire of interrogation, and so multifarious the questions, that they fairly swept Jackson off his feet, and left the other two in little better case.

When the hubbub was at its height,

there came, from behind the rest, a hearty, bustling sort of a voice. "Arrah! arrah! boys," it pleaded. "Don't you see you're crowding the young lady? Make room for old Mother Joyce. How are you, me darlint? It's terrible glad I am to see you; gladder than you are to see any of us, I'll venture. There! deary! don't cry. It's all right."

The old woman's voice dropped to a soothing note. For Dorothy, all the experiences of the past two weeks coming on her afresh at sight of a woman's face, had broken down completely, and was sobbing on Mother Joyce's ample bosom.

"Oh!" she wailed, "I didn't know how awful it has been until I saw you. All these dead ships——" Her voice died away.

"I know! I know! It was fifteen years ago that I—but I remimber. There, mavourneen, be aisy. Come along down to Mother Joyce's cabin and have your cry out."

She took Dorothy down a hatchway some distance from the babbling throng, into a cool and airy cabin.

“Sit down wid yees,” she commanded. “Sit down with Mother Joyce and wape it all out. I understand, dear heart; I understand.”

Dorothy’s curiosity soon mastered her tears, and before long the two women were exchanging confidences like old friends. Belonging to two different social worlds, elsewhere they would never have known each other. But adventure makes strange companions.

After a while Joe tapped at the door.

“Cap’n Forbes says, Mother Joyce,” he explained, “as how he hopes you an’ the young lady will take supper with him.”

Mother Joyce looked at Dorothy, who responded promptly.

“I’ll be glad to do so, of course,” she answered.

“All right, Joe. We’ll come.” Then,

as the sailor's footsteps died away, the old lady turned to Dorothy. "My dear," she essayed diffidently. "It's cautioning you a bit I must be. It's a bad state of things for a pretty young woman like yourself we're after having here, so it is. Will you be goin' to marry that young man who saved your life and who's been so kind to you ever since the wreck?"

Dorothy sat up very straight, and her cheeks flamed.

"Indeed, I am not," she exclaimed.

Mother Joyce looked more troubled than ever. "It's not for idle curiosity I'm asking," she continued, "but because—Are you quite certain you don't want to marry him? It's good and true he looks and—maybe it's not another chance you'll be getting."

Dorothy's cheeks still burned, but uneasiness tugged at her heart-strings. Clearly there was something behind the old woman's words—something of grave import, too. Joe and Bill had also hinted something she did not quite understand.

“Marriage between me and Mr. Howard is entirely out of the question,” she replied quietly. “There are reasons that I can’t go into now. But I wish you would tell me exactly what the trouble is, dear Mother Joyce; for I am sure there is something dreadfully wrong.”

Mother Joyce studied the girl for a moment.

“Faith and I will,” she acquiesced. “Maybe it’s all right it is—if you’re certain you don’t want to marry that young man of yours. The trouble is the plentiful lack of females we have here in the sea. You haven’t seen Prudence Gallagher yet. She’s the one other woman here. She drifted in alone and half crazy on the ship Swan two years ago. Her husband and everybody else had been drowned. In the two years she’s been here she’s been married four times.”

“Four times! How horrible! How could she——”

“It’s no choice she had. There were

twenty odd men here and only two women besides her. It's not much about men in the rough you'll be knowing, I think. Prudence had to make her choice and make it quick. She *had* to, or—well, she did the best she could, and she married two days after she got here. Six months later the poor creature was a widow—her husband killed by a block fallin' from aloft and knocking his brains out. The morning after she married again. She had to, you'll understand. Six or eight months afterward her second husband disappeared, and Cap'n Forbes declared it's dead he must be, and that she must marry once more. So marry she did. Three months ago Mr. Gallegher's wife died—Mr. Gallegher is the mate—and within a week Prudence was a widow once more. It was a big snake that Captain Forbes keeps as a pet that did the worruk that time; it got loose and crushed poor Strother to death. The very next day Prudence was forced to marry

Gallegher—and her with a two-months'-old baby. Captain Forbes, you'll understand, had a wife of his own all this time, but she died a week ago, and it's myself that's looking for somethin' to happen to Gallegher any day."

Dorothy gasped. "You mean——" she cried.

"I mane that Cap'n Forbes wants a wife mighty bad, and that Gallegher wants even worse to find one for him. I mane that you'd better be considerin' whether you'd rather marry your young man—or Cap'n Forbes."

Dorothy listened with strained attention. This thing was too horrible to be true. That she, Dorothy Fairfax, ran the slightest danger of being forced to marry anybody was simply unthinkable. Mother Joyce was exaggerating. This Prudence Gallegher must be a weak sort of a woman—not one by whom to measure herself.

She turned to Mrs. Joyce. "Have—

have *you* been married more than once?" she asked.

A grim look banished the kindly lines from Mother Joyce's face. "Only once, mavourneen," she answered. "I gave them all to understand long ago that if they did away with Tim, it's follow him I would—after I had killed all of them I could. And they belaved me. Besides, it's an old woman I am—not a pretty young colleen like you. You'd better be after takin' my advice; marry your young man quick if you want him and stay on your own ship till he can get you away from here."

"But they all say we can't get away."

"Arrah! Go way wid you! Tell me twinty men can't get away from anywhere if it's any sinse they've got. Cap'n Forbes could have got us ashore long ago if he'd been wantin' to. It's talk he does about gittin' stuck in the weed! What's a lot of weed? You can cut through it, can't you? Faith, the rale trouble is

Cap'n Forbes ain't wantin' to go, an' he's the only wan here with any seafarin' since and any git up and git about him—unless your young man is after havin' some."

"Mr. Howard said we could get away if we could get a boat and compass and ——"

"Oh! Sure, you'll have to be havin' a boat and some instruments to guide her, an' it's none so aisy to foind boats here. It's me own opinion that the cap'n has destroyed all he found, so it is. As for compasses and such like, sure the cap'n has thim right enough locked away in his storehouse, even though he kapes them mighty secret. He don't want to go himself and, be the same token, he don't want any wan else to go. He moightn't be such a big man if he was ashore, so he moightn't! But you and your friends can get away—if Cap'n Forbes don't prevent."

Freed from the restraint of Dorothy's

presence, the conversation on deck had grown even more animated than before. Howard and Jackson could scarcely answer one question before half a dozen more were plumped at them. Evidently, thirst for news of the world had not died out in the members of the colony.

Howard noticed, however, that Forbes himself soon drew aside from the rest and engaged in earnest talk with Joe and Bill, evidently questioning them in regard to the Queen and her passengers, and that later he devoted himself particularly to drawing out Jackson. Finally he came toward Howard.

“I guess your throat’s pretty dry, Mr. Howard,” he said, “and if you’ll come down to my cabin, I’ll see if I can’t find something to irrigate it with.”

Howard willingly accepted the invitation. From all he had heard it was obvious to him that this puppet king had resolutely set his face against any member of his colony leaving the wreck pack,

and it was highly necessary to discover whether he would go so far as to oppose any attempts of the newcomers in that direction. If a contest was to come, the sooner Howard knew it, the better.

Forbes led the way to his cabin and pushed forward a chair.

“Choose your own poison, Mr. Howard,” he offered hospitably, indicating a sideboard loaded with bottles. “We have pretty nearly everything there is. A single steamer last month brought us more than we could drink in a lifetime. What I have here doesn’t represent half her selection. There is beer in the ice-box over in that corner, if you prefer it.”

Upon Howard’s accepting the beer, his host set half a dozen bottles on the table, adding one of whiskey for himself.

“Bourbon is good enough for me,” he observed. “I sample the fancy drinks once in a while, but always come back to the straight stuff. I’m surprised that you don’t also. You are a naval officer, aren’t

you? I hope you are better up in other details of your profession."

Howard laughed. "Hard drinking isn't exactly compulsory in the service," he observed, lightly.

"Oh, no offense! I was only joking, of course. I suppose you have specialists in that line as well as in others. From what I read in the papers that drift in to us here, I take it that everything is being specialized nowadays. What's your particular line — navigating, engineering, submarining?"

Howard laughed again. "This is an age of specialization, all right, captain," he returned, "but it hasn't struck the navy yet. Quite the contrary! Only a year or two ago, Congress wiped out all special lines and insisted that all officers should know everything. Perhaps it was right, but——"

"But you don't think so. Well, it's a good thing to know all about your own job if you can. I suppose, however, you

can't help specializing more or less. For instance, you must have special men who manage your submarines."

"Not exactly. Still, only a few men have had any experience in that line yet. The boats are too new and too few to give everybody a chance yet. Personally, I have been lucky enough to have had a good deal of experience with them, but comparatively few others have as yet."

Forbes threw himself back in his chair with a look of intense satisfaction on his face. "That's good," he said heartily. "Humph! By the way, Howard, this party of yours is a curiously mixed one."

"You think so?"

"Oh, it's evident on the face of it!—Have a cigarette?—A navy officer, a New York policeman, and a girl; that's odd enough, isn't it? Not that sailors and girls are antipathetic—quite the contrary—but where does the policeman come in? I don't quite place him in the picture."

Howard lighted his cigarette with a steady hand. "I believe he had been to Porto Rico to bring a convict back to New York," he returned.

"A convict. Humph! Too bad he didn't bring him here. 'There's never a law of God or man runs in the Sargasso Sea.' I'm up in the modern poets, you'll observe, Howard. We have no extradition here. Well, as I was saying, Neptune makes some queer bed-fellows, especially here. Who is the lady, by the way?"

"Miss Dorothy Fairfax, daughter of Colonel John Fairfax, a millionaire railroad man who has been building lines in Porto Rico of late. His daughter was on her way home after visiting him on the island."

Forbes's eyes glittered. "Colonel John Fairfax's daughter, eh! I was reading an article in the paper about him the other day that said he owned about half the railroads in the United States. His

daughter will be quite a catch for a poor man. Eh, Howard!"

Howard made a slight movement. "I would rather not discuss Miss Fairfax, captain," he returned, quietly. "When and how can we get away from here?"

Forbes held his glass to the light and squinted at it. "Well, Howard," he remarked reflectively. "I've been kind of expecting you to ask me that. In fact, I brought you down here to give you a chance to ask me. The truth is, you can't get away at all unless you come to terms with me."

"What are your terms?"

"Well—I'll come to that after a while. Look here, Howard, I've been here ten years and I never was so comfortable in my life before. I've lived easy and slept soft, and never had a minute's worry about grocery bills or taxes, or any of the other plagues of civilization. And my men have been in the same case. They've had just work enough to keep them

healthy, and just drink enough to keep them happy. If they were out of this, they'd either be working like dogs or drunk—also like dogs. Why in thunder should either they or I want to go back to that old damnable life?"

"No reason at all, captain, if you're content here."

"That's the devil of it. I'm not content. I'm just fool enough to ache to get back. But I don't want to go back empty-handed. I don't want to go back poor. I want to go back rich, with influential connections, social relations, and all the rest of it."

Howard smiled. "You're not the only one who wants all that, captain," he observed. "There are others."

"So I suppose. But the difference between them and me is that since you got here I've got all this right in my fist. This morning it was far away; now it is close at hand. As I said, I've been here for ten years. In that time I have been

over about five thousand wrecks, old and new. Nearly every one of them has had money on her. Some have had very large sums. Large or small, I have collected them all. It makes a great fortune for one; it is enough for two; but it isn't a hill of beans among a score."

"I am beginning to see."

"I couldn't take this money away secretly by boat—it's too bulky. I couldn't take it openly without sharing it with a dozen others—and it would need about a dozen to cut a way through this damnable weed. I've been ready to go for six months, but I didn't see my way. Now I do."

"Well."

"Recently I found a safe, quick, and easy way for a man with the right technical knowledge to get away from here with two or three people—and my money. But I didn't have the technical knowledge. Of all the ships that have floated in with libraries on them, not one has had a book

that told me what to do. Now you have come especially trained in the very line I want. Can you guess what my terms are now?"

"Humph! Perhaps. What is your way?"

"Don't worry about that now. It's all right, and that's enough. I'm telling you a good deal, because I want your help, but I'm not giving myself away altogether. But about those terms. If you'll help me get ashore with my money, I'll give you a hundred thousand dollars."

Howard lay back in his chair and stared at his host thoughtfully. The conversation had proceeded far otherwise from what he had expected. The man whose opposition to his leaving he had feared, was actually asking his aid. Yet this assistance was asked not slavishly, but as if the asker could compel it if he liked, but preferred to request. Howard felt that he must choose his words warily.

"Such a question is hardly worth ask-

ing, captain," he returned. "Of course, I shall be glad to accept. I take it for granted that my friends are included in your invitation!"

"Your friends!" Forbes burst into a roar of laughter. "Your friends! That's good! That's very good! One of your friends—Mr. Jackson—I intend to leave behind as a special favor to you."

For an instant Howard saw red. Then the fit passed, and he answered quietly, "You astonish me, captain."

"Oh, no, I don't! Look here, I'm on to you, Howard. You are the convict that Jackson went to Porto Rico for. You are now supposed to be dead. Leave Jackson here, and you can change your name and live anywhere in the world you like in perfect safety."

"And Miss Fairfax?" Howard almost choked as he uttered the words, but the necessity of dissembling was strong upon him.

"Miss Fairfax will go with us—as my wife!"

“What!”

“Sit down, Howard, and keep your shirt on. What’s the use of getting worked up. I know I’m not exactly in Miss Fairfax’s line, but she won’t be the only woman who has married out of her class. I’ll make good with her father, all right.”

“You think you can get Miss Fairfax to marry you?”

In spite of himself the scorn that Howard tried to hide showed in his voice. Forbes did not notice it.

“She can’t help herself,” he declared. “I’ve got her dead to rights. Besides, I’ve got the law—our law—on my side. You don’t suppose ordinary rules govern here, do you? Not much! The sexes are too frightfully disproportionate. Counting your party, there are just twenty-four men and only three women here. The coming of a new woman has always been the signal for trouble. Bad blood, quarrels, and murders have followed inevitably. So we made a law some years

ago that every woman must marry within twenty-four hours after her arrival. Under that law I intend to marry Miss Fairfax. What have you to say about it?"

With the last word Captain Forbes put his elbows on the table and leaned forward, staring into Howard's face. Huge, shaggy, and evidently immensely powerful, he towered menacingly above the smaller naval officer.

Howard wanted to say a good deal, but forbore. Clearly Forbes took him for an ordinary scoundrel who had his price like other scoundrels. If he was to help Dorothy, the obvious thing was to appear to fall in with the plan until opportunity offered to defeat it, or until action could no longer be deferred. That is, he must gain time, and the only way to gain time was to dissimulate.

"I don't believe I have anything to say about it just now, captain," he returned, mildly, "except that I think you could

make a better bargain with Colonel Fairfax if you merely returned his daughter to him safely. She'll hate you forever, you know."

Forbes's brows relaxed. "Not much she won't," he returned. "She'll come to time, all right, and mighty soon, too. I know how to handle the sex. She'll be too proud to confess the truth, and she'll praise me up to the skies. You'll see! Besides, I don't want the old man's money; I'll have enough of my own. I want his social help. Well! is it a bargain?"

Howard hesitated. "I must think about it for a while, captain," he returned.

"What do you want to think about? Oh! I guess I see! You've got an idea of marrying the girl yourself, I reckon. Humph! Son-in-law saves girl, and rich daddy saves son-in-law. I don't blame you, but I guess I'll just have to queer that game once for all. Gallegher!"

The last word came like a pistol-shot. Howard leaped to his feet, only to find three armed men standing behind him.

Forbes threw himself back in his chair and laughed.

“Stung!” he remarked lightly. “You might as well go quietly, Howard. There’s no use of committing suicide, you know. We won’t hurt you—you’re too valuable. And we’ll turn you loose—after the ceremony.”

X

FOR one moment, as the men closed in on him, Howard struggled with a furious desire to wrest a cutlass from one of them, and with it exact terms from the others. The odds, though great, were not necessarily overwhelming, and victory would mean much. Had he stood on equal terms before the law, he would have risked everything in an immediate fight.

But he did not stand even. Against him as a convict fighting for freedom, Forbes could throw the entire population of his colony; even Jackson might join in the unequal odds. The result of a struggle on that basis must be inevitable; Dorothy would lose her only defender. Later, when the time came, if it did come, to shift the fight to the defense of womanhood, he would have a better cause and might win allies. So he surrendered.

“Take him to the Chester,” ordered Forbes, “and lock him up. Give him anything he wants to make him comfortable, and see after his meals. If he makes any trouble, put him in irons. Off with you.”

Sick at heart, Howard marched away between his captors. The way led to the edge of the wide platform that constituted the village, down a gangplank, and away for some distance across the wrecks. Finally it led through a rent in the side of a big iron steamer, and up to what had evidently once been the captain's cabin. Into this he was thrust.

Gallegher paused, with his hand on the lock. “You heard what the cap'n said,” he growled. “You behave yourself and nobody'll hurt you. And, remember, there ain't a mite of use tryin' to escape, because there ain't nowhere to escape to.”

The door slammed and Howard was left to his own reflections.

His first act was, of course, to inspect

his prison. It was not uncomfortable. Large, airy, and well furnished, it had evidently been selected because all its sides were of iron, three of them being formed by the sides of the vessel, and the fourth by one of her bulkheads. Numerous port-holes admitted air and light, but were too small for a man's body to pass through them. A skylight overhead had been closed with heavy timbers. Altogether it was a strong place.

Before he had had much more than time enough to familiarize himself with his surroundings, the key grated in the lock, and one of his captors entered with a tray, which he placed on a table built around the mizzenmast of the ship.

"Here's your dinner, sor," he announced.

Howard came over and sat down. As he did so, his eyes fell on some curious-looking mechanism which the man had pushed aside in making room for the tray. A question sprang to his lips, but

he choked it back as the other bent suddenly forward.

“I heard of what you said to Bill and Joe, sor,” he breathed. “Is it true that you could get away from here if you had the chance, sor?”

“True? Of course it’s true. Give me a boat, two or three men, and a compass, and I’d start away at an hour’s notice. I wonder that you men don’t see that.”

“And will you take me and Kathleen with you when you go, sor? Kathleen’s my wife—Mother Joyce they call her, sor, though its nather chick nor child we’re after having, sor.”

“I’ll take anybody. But I’ve got to be free in order to prepare——”

“Whist! That’ll be all right, sor. Kape a stiff upper lip and everything will come right. The young lady and you have friends here, sor. I don’t dare to stop now, but it’s back again I’ll be later on.”

Howard made no effort to detain the

man. He was in a fever of impatience to examine the instruments on the table, and the moment he heard the key turn in the lock, he pushed aside his dinner and began to finger them.

“It isn’t possible,” he muttered. “It isn’t possible! Forbes would know better. But, by George, he doesn’t. It’s true! It’s true! *He’s locked me up with a wireless outfit.* If it’s only in working order.” He pressed the key and a rumble and a crash gave answer. “It is! It is!” he exulted. “By Heaven! It is!”

“Now to raise somebody before Forbes finds me out,” he continued. “If the wireless only sent as silently as it received, it would be all right. But—well! maybe no one will notice. It’s pretty noisy here! Anyhow, there’s nothing to do but try.”

He placed his finger on the key. “Let’s see!” he soliloquized. “The naval station at Guantanamo is nearest, but I don’t know its call. I’ll have to try C Q D—the emergency signal.”

Again and again he pressed the key, and again and again the apparatus roared, sending the cry for help broadcast over the sea. No interruption came. The village was some distance away, and the noise passed unheard or unheeded. "C Q D! C Q D!" he called.

At last the answer came, faint but distinct, whispering in through the microphone on his head. "Hello! Hello! Hello!" it sounded. "Who's this?"

"Survivor of the wrecked steamer Queen, now on board an unknown steamer in the middle of the Sargasso Sea. Is this Guantanamo?"

Sharply the answer came: "Yes. What did you say? Survivors of the Queen? Good Heavens, you were given up for lost. How many are you?"

"Three! Miss Fairfax——"

"Great Scott! Colonel Fairfax has been wild. Who else?"

"Police Officer Jackson!"

"Yes."

“And Frank Howard.”

“What! The murderer?”

“No. The convict. This is he talking.”

“Oh! Beg pardon! Didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. Where did you say you were?”

“We drifted into the Sargasso Sea on the Queen, and brought up finally against the wreck-pack in the middle. Then we changed to another ship. It’s a long story. You’d better note it down carefully. I may be cut off any minute.”

“Oh! I’ll note it down all right. Go ahead. But first about the others on the Queen. Two boats got to port all right. How about the third?”

“Capsized! All lost except Miss Fairfax, who was washed back to the Queen, and pulled aboard by Jackson and Howard, who had been left there by accident. Now listen. This is urgent. We are in great danger here, and need aid at the first possible moment——”

“In danger? What’s the matter?”

“Listen, and I’ll tell you.”

Hurriedly, but concisely, Howard narrated their adventures, describing the wreck-pack and its queer colony, and pointing out the danger to which Miss Fairfax was subjected. Toward the end of the story, Guantanamo evidently became restless, for he broke in.

“Say!” he clicked, disgustedly. “Do you expect me to believe all that?”

“Surely. Why not?”

“Because it’s nonsense. Say, friend, you are wasted at sea. You ought to be a New York yellow-journal reporter. Now, who the devil are you, really?”

“I’ve told you.”

“You’ve told me a pack of lies—begging your pardon. I’d get into a pretty fix if I reported this nonsense; now, wouldn’t I?”

“You’ll get into a worse one if you don’t. For God’s sake, man, don’t be a skeptical fool. As I’ve told you, I’m a

prisoner, and am only able to talk to you because this man Forbes apparently knows nothing of the wireless. My jail may be changed any minute, and I may never get another chance. This thing is very serious. There are about twenty-five people hopelessly confined here on these wrecks, and aid should be sent them at once."

"Bah! You mean to tell me that people have been living there for years and years, and nobody has ever found it out?"

"Lots of people have found it out, but nobody has ever gone back to tell. If you never heard of the wreck-pack, ask any old sailor, and he'll tell you of it—though he's never seen it or known any one who has. Why shouldn't there be people on it?"

"Well, suppose there are. How can we help you?"

"A ship can get to us if it tries hard enough. The weed can be cut through,

though with difficulty. A sort of steam-saw projecting over the bow will do the work. The propeller will have to be screened to prevent fouling. Perhaps a paddle-wheel steamer would get along best. When it is once in, it should skirt the edge of the wreckage till it finds us. The latitude and longitude I have given you are only approximate. I have no proper instruments."

"Who shall I notify?"

"Notify Colonel Fairfax, first of all. This Forbes may keep his threat and marry Miss Fairfax by force, or he may not. He shall not if I can help it. But I'm a prisoner and helpless just at present, though I have made at least one friend and hope for some others. Anyway, Colonel Fairfax will want to rescue his daughter. Then notify the government; there must be ships at Guantana-mo now that could start for here very soon. Then notify the newspapers; if no one else will help us, they will. Notify

anybody and everybody you like. Stop! Somebody's coming. Keep out till I call you again."

It was only the Irishman who came to take away the tray. He must have heard the rumbling of the wireless, for only a deaf man could have failed to do so, but he asked no questions about it, though he looked sharply at the instruments that Howard had thrust aside.

Howard in fact gave him little chance, plying him with questions as to Forbes's probable course of action. After he had gone, Howard talked with Guantanamo until late in the night.

The next morning the man came again. "Can you foight, sor?" he demanded.

"Fighting is my trade, Joyce. Why?"

"Well, sor, the captain's going to marry the young lady at four o'clock the day, unless somebody stops him. And the only way to stop him is to foight him. It's a big man an' a bad man he is, sor. Are ye game for it?"

Howard smiled. "Oh! yes. I'm game," he declared.

"Then I'll get ye out in good time. Tare and 'oun's, but it'll be a grand foight entoirely."

XI

IN accepting Captain Forbes's invitation to supper Dorothy had taken it for granted that the other two survivors of the Queen were included, and was somewhat startled to find that they were not.

"Gallegher insisted on your friends eating with him," explained Forbes, with a smile. "He declared that I might have the best, but that I shouldn't hog everything, and I had to give in."

Dorothy accepted the explanation, but her heart beat anxiously. Nor was her anxiety lessened by Captain Forbes's attitude. Had she not been warned of his probable designs, she might have passed over his behavior as merely the would-be gallantry of an uncultivated man, and even then would have found it sufficiently offensive. But, in view of all she had been told, its import quickly became porten-

tous. Between extravagant compliments, often so pointed as to cause her considerable embarrassment, Forbes sandwiched encomiums of the life on the wreckage, for support of which he appealed to Mother Joyce, declaring that Dorothy would soon submit to the inevitable, and settle down to remain there for life. All suggestions as to the possibility of escape he pushed aside.

“Our known history of life here goes back for more than fifty years,” he declared, “and in that time nobody has escaped. Nobody ever will. It’s impossible. You will fight against the idea for awhile, and then settle down to enjoy yourself.”

“Enjoy myself!”

“Why not? We have everything here that any one needs—all the necessities, and far more of the luxuries than any except a very few favored people enjoy anywhere. We have a storehouse full of everything that delights a woman, and if

it was destroyed to-morrow, we could easily fill it again. Duplicates of all its contents will drift in to us again sooner or later on some ship. Ask what you will, and it will be my delight to lay it at your feet."

Dorothy tried to smile. "Very well, then," she particularized, "just give me a telegraph-office."

"With pleasure. We have a complete outfit. I'm sorry to say, though, that the wires are not strung yet."

"Then give me a boat and a—compass, isn't it, that we need?"

"Those are about the only things we cannot furnish, Miss Fairfax. When sailors are forced to leave their ships, they invariably take the boats and the compasses with them. But why do you wish to leave us? It will be our constant study to make you happy. You shall have the best of everything, and your lightest wish shall be law."

"My only wish is to get back to dry

land. If my wish is law, help me to do so."

"I cannot! And I would not if I could. I have waited long for a woman as fair and sweet as you to drift in to me, and now that you have come, I will not give you up lightly. The wrecks and their contents are ours by right of salvage. You, too, are salvage—and the fairest salvage I have ever known."

This was forcing the game with a vengeance. Dorothy's lip quivered, and she cast a frightened glance at Mother Joyce. But that lady was eating her supper stolidly, and made no sign. Evidently, for the moment at least, she intended to let Dorothy play her own hand.

Forbes continued: "No, you are here for life, Miss Fairfax. I regret it for your sake, but I rejoice in it for my own. You are here for life, and you must make up your mind to it, choose a husband, and settle down."

"I shall never marry."

“You must consider a moment. There are twenty-two of us men here and only two women. Under such circumstances, how can we afford to permit any woman to remain single. We used to do it years ago, when the disproportion was not quite so great, and what was the result? Decimation of our numbers, no less! The men quarreled and fought and murdered each other, exactly as wild beasts do, all for the sake of one woman. Well do I remember the last time this happened! In a week five men had been killed, and bad blood stirred up that did not subside for years. We could not chance a repetition of this sort of thing, and we made a law that every woman who arrived here must marry within twenty-four hours. She could choose any one she liked, but choose she must.”

“But no such rule can apply to me.”

“Why not? You are a lady, of course, and far above the level of nine-tenths of the men here. But there is the remain-

ing tenth to choose from. Of course, none of us are worthy of you, but—we will make good husbands.”

Dorothy tried to laugh the words away, but could not. She told herself that all this was some horrible dream from which she would presently awake, but all the while she knew it was terribly real. The toils were closing round her fast. Her thoughts flew to Howard. He, she felt, would save her, if man could; but he was one, and Forbes and his followers were many. If it came to a struggle the result would be inevitable. What could she do? What *could* she do?

Forbes was watching her keenly. “You realize the situation now? he continued. “For our own welfare we cannot permit you to remain single. You could not get away, and we would not permit you to do so if you could. You must marry—in twenty-four hours. And since you must marry, let me advise you to choose one who can provide for you—and there is no

one here who can do that so well as I. I won't talk about love—that is for boys, and I am a man; but if you will marry me, you shall be queen here. Come! what do you say?"

Dorothy pushed back her chair and rose. "I say that this is utterly preposterous. I will not marry any one on compulsion. Certainly I will not marry you. I wish you good day, Captain Forbes."

She turned toward the door, but Forbes stepped before her.

"One moment, Miss Fairfax," he said. "I know how you feel, and I do not wish to turn you against me by undue persistency. If you want to go now, go! But think over what I have said. I believe that you will come to see that it is the best thing you can possibly do. Talk it over with your friends, I think they will advise you to consent. At all events, you have twenty-four hours—till four o'clock to-morrow, to get used to the idea. Take my advice and wait calmly till then."

Dorothy bowed haughtily. "Very well," she returned. "I will wait. Now, will you kindly summon my friends. I wish to return to my ship."

Forbes' lips curved in a cruel smile. "*Your* ship, Miss Fairfax," he echoed. "You have no ship. You and your companions abandoned the Queen of your own accord, and by the law of the sea she and everything on her became the property of any one who salvaged her. My men have taken possession of everything, including your abandoned trunks—which are now mine. You have no place to lay your head, and nothing in the world except what you have on your person. However, I am not unkind. For twenty-four hours I will give you food and shelter. At the end of that time—well, we will see. Now you may go with Mother Joyce, who will care for you. And think over my proposition."

XII

Dorothy's hours of grace passed all too quickly. The girl's natural impulse was to turn at once to Howard for aid, and when the moments sped by without bringing him, she turned to Mrs. Joyce and learned of his imprisonment.

"But don't you be worryin' about that, miss," said the kindly Irishwoman. "It's safe and sound he is. The cap'n is just kapin' him locked up till after the wedding."

"There'll be no wedding," flashed Dorothy.

"An' why not? It's worse you might do, my dear. All men are cantankerous, but Cap'n Forbes ain't a bad sort, if you take him the right way; an' he'll make a good husband—the best here, anyway. An' you've got to remember that while a smart man might get out of here, if

he was free, even the smartest man—let alone a woman—couldn't if the cap'n didn't want him to; and sure it is the cap'n don't want you to go. I know it's hard, but I don't see but what it's the best thing you can do—seein' you wouldn't marry your friend, Mr. Howard, under any circumstances." And Mother Joyce glanced quizzically into Dorothy's face.

The girl blushed; then hid her face. "Oh! Mrs. Joyce," she sobbed. "I—he—things were different when I said that."

"Oh! indade! Now, were they? You nad'n't say any more, miss. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. It's a fine, upstandin' young fellow he is, and I don't blame you. Joyce and I'll do what we can for you and him. And you'll not be lavin' us behind when you sail away?"

"Leave you! Never!"

Fortunate it was that this understanding had been reached so quickly, for little

further opportunity for talk was offered later. All that evening and all the next morning the members of the community visited Dorothy, one by one, each with tales to tell of the pleasures of life in the Sea and with praises of Captain Forbes. Not one seemed disposed to help the girl.

Even Mr. Willoughby, the minister, could give her little comfort. When she appealed to him directly to help her, he squirmed uncomfortably.

“Captain Forbes is a man of wrath,” he mumbled; “hard to resist. My sacred calling is of little import in his eyes. If you decide to refuse him, I trust I shall find strength to offer you such support as I may. But you must remember that I am only one—and a man of peace besides.”

Clearly there was little hope to be placed in the minister. But Dorothy made one more appeal.

“You could refuse to perform the ceremony,” she suggested, tearfully.

“And so I shall,” promised Mr. Willoughby. “If I must,” he added, with quickly following repentance. “But to what end? Captain Forbes is a sea-captain, and as such can perform marriages at sea. Whether he can marry himself is doubtful. But I know him; he will settle the doubt in his own favor and marry you willy-nilly. I—I really think that you had best submit. Since you have to stay here, you cannot occupy a better place than as Captain Forbes’s wife.”

“But I don’t have to stay. I won’t stay. Mr. Howard promised——” She stopped and bit her lip. “I see you cannot help me, Mr. Willoughby,” she finished. “Good morning.”

The minister sneaked away, and Prudence Gallagher crept in, weak, ill, and frightened, to add her mite to the weight that was crushing Dorothy’s heart.

“I’m sorry,” she whimpered, glancing fearfully behind her from time to time. “Oh, I’m so sorry. But—but hadn’t you

better marry Cap'n Forbes? Nobody will dare to hurt him, and—and—you won't be handed on from one to another as I was."

This sort of thing, kept up almost without cessation for twenty-four hours, drove Dorothy almost to distraction. As four o'clock drew near, her condition grew pitiful. In vain she looked for a means of escape. If any had offered she would have taken it instantly, facing without hesitation the terrors of the foodless desert in the heart of the wreckage. But none did offer. Always she was surrounded by jailers. She could see no hope anywhere—nothing to do but resist till the last, and then—— What then? What should she do then? What could she do? One weak girl beset by a score of men. Her brain reeled at the thought.

Eight bells rang out, and Joe appeared at the door.

"Cap'n Forbes says as how will you an' Mother Joyce please step on deck, miss," he petitioned.

XIII

THE deck had been decorated as for a gala occasion. Bright-colored flags were twined everywhere under the cool, airy awnings; canaries, in gilded cages, hung about, each carolling at the top of its tiny throat; the members of the colony were all standing about, each dressed in garments which, though perhaps lacking somewhat in taste and style, at least left nothing to be desired in the way of color or ornament. The scene, though odd, was undoubtedly bright and cheerful.

Mother Joyce led Dorothy to a slightly raised platform, in front of which were ranged chairs, in which, at her approach, the sailors hurriedly seated themselves. Dorothy looked eagerly among them for a sight of Howard, and her last hope vanished when she knew he was not there.

As she stepped upon the platform,

Forbes came up from below. Clean shaven, and well and correctly dressed, he furnished a strong contrast to the others with their motley attire.

He bowed courteously to Dorothy, and greeted her as though their relations were of the pleasantest. "Please sit down for a moment," he concluded, and turned away without waiting to see whether the invitation was accepted.

"Men," he said, stepping to the edge of the platform and looking them over, "by our laws every unmarried woman coming into this community must, within twenty-four hours, choose a husband from those who come forward to offer themselves. The one she chooses must defend his right against all others, and, if conquered, must give way to his conqueror. So she will wed the best man, and all smoldering quarrels that might disrupt our community will be avoided."

He paused a moment and then went on:

"As you all know, Miss Fairfax joined

us yesterday. She is so far above all of us in beauty, grace, and culture that it is presumptuous for any of us to aspire to her hand. Yet, the law is the law, and we must all bow to it. So I call on all candidates for her hand to speak out that she may choose. I offer, for one. Who else comes forward?"

He stopped and looked around inquiringly, but no one moved. Evidently all knew what was planned, and had no wish to interpose. Even if not awed by his ascendancy, his significant assertion that the favored suitor must defend his right against all comers was enough to give them pause. For Forbes was six feet high, broad and strong in proportion.

After a moment, seeing that no one spoke, Forbes turned to Dorothy. "It seems, fair lady," he began, "that I am the only suitor for your hand. I beg you to believe, however, that this is rather from the desire of my men not to oppose the dearest hope of their captain, whom

they so love, than from any lack of appreciation of your charms. But it comes to the same thing. I am the only candidate. Does it please you to accept me?"

Dorothy rose and faced him. "Sir," she said, with a break in her voice. "I am only a girl, alone, unprotected, far from all her friends. I beg you, I implore you, to be merciful. Do not do this thing. Let me go."

Forbes shook his head. "Your presence here, single, must cause strife," he began, "and——"

"Then let me go away. Let me wander away by myself. You nor your men shall ever see me again. I will lose myself in the wreckage, and——"

"You are salvage, and I cannot surrender you."

"Think! Think! My father is rich—a multimillionaire. In his name I promise you a million dollars if you will spare me and get me back to him. Think! A million dollars."

“Even if I would, it is impossible. We are all alike helpless here.”

“You will not spare me?”

“I love you too much to do so.”

With a quick movement Dorothy pushed by him and faced the others. “Men,” she cried, “will you let this thing be done? Will you let me be forced into marriage with a man I loathe. For God’s sake have pity on me, and say to this man that he shall not do this thing.”

The men shifted uneasily in their seats, but no one spoke. Dorothy’s eyes flashed.

“Cowards!” she cried. “Is there not one of you who dares face this man. Come! I offer you a bargain. If any man will save me, to him will I give myself in all wifely humility. Any man! *Any* man! Speak! What! Does no one speak? Am I so poor a prize?”

“I speak!”

Absorbed in the scene, no one had noted Howard’s approach, but at the sound of

his voice all faced him. His sea-stained clothes were torn, and there was a fleck of blood on his lip, but his glance was high.

“I speak,” he repeated. “Not for the prize, but for the honor of womanhood.” He turned to Forbes, who had flushed furiously at his appearance. “Ah! you craven,” he flared. “You thought you had me safe while you worked your coward will. Look better to your shackles next time.”

Three or four of the men had risen and were closing in on Howard, but Forbes waved them back. “Since you are here,” he remarked, nonchalantly, “do I understand that you offer as a candidate for the lady’s hand? If not, you have no standing.”

“I offer for anything that will save this lady from your insults.”

“Ah! So you *do* offer. That is well. That is in line with the very object of this ceremony and shows the wisdom of

our laws. You and I will fight this out and bury all ill-feeling—in your grave. Kindly choose some one as second, and let's get to work."

Howard looked around him. "I'll take my companion, Jackson," he decided. "I suppose you've got him locked up somewhere."

"Bring him," ordered Forbes, calmly. He turned to Howard and began to take off his coat. "Get ready," he ordered.

"You'll give me fair play?"

"Surely. And marry you to the lady—if you win."

In the revulsion of feeling consequent on the appearance of her champion, Dorothy's limbs had given way, and she would have fallen had not Mother Joyce caught her and helped her to a chair, where she leaned back, white and dazed. When she recovered enough to note what was going on, Howard and Forbes, stripped to the waist, stood facing each other before her, the latter towering, giant-like, above his smaller adversary.

With a cry she sought to struggle up, but Mother Joyce restrained her. "Don't interfere," she whispered. "It's your only chance."

"But he'll kill him."

The older woman seemed to have no difficulty in assigning the confused pronouns correctly. "I'm not so sure," she muttered consolingly. "I fancy the captain has his work cut out for him. Anyhow, it's for you to kape still."

Jackson's eyes had lighted up when he had reached Howard's side and understood what game was on. "It's many a fight I had in the ring myself before I went on the force," he whispered, with something very nearly approaching enthusiasm. "It's a big fellow he is. Can you do him?"

Howard smiled grimly. "I've got to," he answered.

"Well, take the tip from me and tire him out. He's too big to rush, and if he hits you square once, he'll knock you out

of the ring. Sprint all you can. Get him mad. He's got a wicked temper, if I know anything of men; and when he loses it, he'll forget to guard, and you can slug him."

Under other circumstances Howard would have smiled at the detective's unaccustomed volubility, but at the moment he had other things to think about. With a nod to show that he understood, he stepped forward to face his adversary.

The disproportion between the two men was very marked. Howard was not a small man, but Forbes was several inches taller, and at least forty pounds heavier. His corded arms looked capable of felling an ox. On the other hand, he was twenty years older, and presumably, slower in his movements than the naval officer, who was in the prime of the late twenties.

Forbes wasted no time in preliminaries. Evidently he meant to show his power by crushing his adversary without delay. The moment that Howard faced

him he sprang forward and launched a right-hand swing that would have ended the fight then and there had it connected with Howard's body. But it did not connect. Howard sprang back, just out of reach, and returned a half-arm jolt that brought the big man up standing.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, stepping back. Then he grinned viciously. "You know something, do you," he half soliloquized. "So much the better. There'll be some sport in it."

He rushed in again, striking furiously.

Howard gave ground slowly under the attack, dodging when he could, parrying as he might, every nerve alert to save himself from being crushed by the sheer weight of his adversary. In vain Forbes tried to beat down his guard. Dorothy's frightened face was ever before his eyes, and he fought on breathless, but unharmed, until the first fury of the attack had spent itself; until the passing moments told him that the struggle would

not be so uneven as it had seemed. Exultation swelled in him when at last he could stand steady and give back blow for blow.

Gradually his opponent's mood changed. From coolness to anger; from anger to baffled fury. Howard watched the changes as they mirrored themselves in the other's face. And when, with the recklessness of utter rage, Forbes dropped his guard and threw all his weight into one smashing blow, Howard ducked beneath it, swung his right with deadly force against the bull neck and beat the devil's tattoo on the thick ribs before him.

Then the round ended.

But Howard knew that there was still plenty of fight in the big man. He had shaken him, but had accomplished nothing more. Indeed, the fury of the attack in the second round was little less than that of the first, and Howard again had to give ground. Had Forbes been able to regain his temper as he had regained

his strength, there would still have been little doubt as to the result.

But this the captain could not do. So often had he fought and won in the past, so invariably had his bull strength served him well, that he could not believe that he had at last met one who could withstand him. Wild with rage, he spent himself against the impenetrable defense of the naval officer until the second round ended with the odds of the fight in favor of the latter.

So plain was this that Gallegher urged treachery, only to be repelled; not yet would Forbes admit the possibility of defeat. "Naw! I'll kill him myself," he muttered hoarsely, as, red-eyed, he stumbled forward once more to the attack.

Howard met him with changed tactics. Jackson's trained eye had read the signs, and he had counselled the officer wisely. "Rush him," he had said. "Rush him. He's all in. Don't give him time to get his second wind. Rush him."

And Howard obeyed, drawing on some fount of nervous energy for a fury of attack almost as violent as Forbes's had been. The fighting rage was on him at last, and bubbled over in words.

"So you'll persecute a helpless woman, will you," he jeered, as he handed a jolt on the captain's cheek. "How do you like to face a man? Oh! never mind that eye; you've got one left. Don't worry about your nose; it'll straighten out again. Here's one for your solar plexus. Why don't you guard better? And here's the end of the show."

With every ounce of his weight behind it, he drove his left against the point of the captain's chin, and that individual went down like a pole-axed ox and lay still.

As he fell Gallegher sprang forward, belaying-pin in hand, but shrank back again as Jackson shoved his revolver into his face.

"Hold hard!" cried the policeman. "Fair play, ain't it, mates?"

For an instant the situation hung in the wind as the sailors hesitated. Then Joyce sang out:

“Fair play!” he cried. “The cap’n said he should have fair play. And hurrah for Lieutenant Howard, says I.”

Sailors are like children; a straw will turn them. With one accord they burst into a cheer. “It was a good fight,” they cried. “The lieutenant’s won the girl fair.”

While they had hesitated Howard had acted. He was under no illusions as to the permanency of their mood, and, even as they cheered him, he turned to Dorothy.

“Quick!” he whispered. “Don’t lose a moment. Come, Jackson! Get Miss Fairfax out of this and back to the Queen. I’ll cover your retreat.”

But escape was not to be so easy. As Howard turned to face the sailors, Forbes struggled to his feet. His face was gray with rage and his words came thick.

“You’ve won,” he gritted. “You’ve won. Take your prize.” Then his eyes fell on Dorothy and Jackson, now close to the edge of the deck. “Stop those two!” he yelled. “By Heaven, no one shall say Peter Forbes does not play fair. She’s chosen you, you infernal convict, and marry you she shall, here and now.”

Howard faced him. “I refuse,” he declared. “Miss Fairfax owes me nothing. I give her back her promise.”

“You do! Then she shall marry me. Me or you! The captain or the jailbird. We’ll have a wedding before we part.”

The man’s face was a mass of cuts and bruises, and his words came gaspingly; but there was no doubt that he was in earnest, and none that he had the men behind him.

Fickle as the wind, they veered back to his side. “A wedding. Let’s have a wedding!” they cried.

Howard looked despairingly around, then darted to the mainmast, caught up

a handspike, and swung Dorothy behind him. The fight would be hopeless, but it was for her!

“Come on,” he challenged.

Grimly the men drew near, but before a blow could be struck, Dorothy’s voice rang out.

“Wait!” she cried. Then she turned to Howard. “If you will have me, I will marry you,” she murmured, gently.

XIV

NIGHT was falling fast as Howard and Dorothy, with Jackson close behind, made their way slowly back to the Queen over the tangled wreckage, following the trail blazed by Howard two days before. The Joyces had promised to join them later.

Except for necessary help and caution about the road, the three walked and climbed for the most part in silence, each immersed in thought. Only once did Dorothy speak.

“Captain Forbes said that his men had taken possession of the Queen and were removing her stores,” she warned. “Do you think he was telling the truth?”

Howard shook his head. “Probably not,” he answered. “But we shall see.”

The Queen came in view at last, and each of the three thrilled at sight of her familiar form. Wrecked, ruined, half-

sunken, nevertheless she stood to all three as a home and place of refuge, however insecure. Glad as they had been to leave her, they were far gladder to return and find her untouched. For Forbes had been lying.

With the touch of the deck beneath their feet, a feeling of embarrassment descended on the three. On the way over they had been silent because they were thinking; now they were silent because of the strange new relation in which they stood to each other. Even Jackson was conscious of it, and stammered and hesitated when he tried to speak; while Dorothy's flushed cheeks and quivering lips showed that the nerves which had so well sustained her while necessity lasted, were on the verge of giving way.

Fortunately supper had to be prepared and served and eaten, and these familiar tasks relieved the tension somewhat. Even then no one dared to speak of what had occurred, though no one thought of

anything else. The thing lay too close to their hearts to be lightly or easily broached. At last Jackson, with glances at his two companions, threw down his knife and fork and slouched out of the saloon without a word.

Left alone, the girl and the man looked at each other, she with trembling lips and lovely, frightened eyes, and he with an infinite compassion in his face.

“You want to say something to me?” he questioned, gently. “Say it. Don’t be afraid. You will find that I can understand.”

Tears welled in Dorothy’s eyes. “To-day,” she murmured, brokenly, “I made a bargain. I saw myself trapped, driven into marriage with a man whom I loathed—oh, God only knows how I had come to loathe him! Anything was better than he—anything! So I made my offer. I would be a loyal wife to any man who would save me from Captain Forbes. You answered.”

“I answered.”

“You are a much smaller man than Captain Forbes. No one would have thought you a match for him, least of all himself. He meant to kill you. There was murder in his eye. You must have seen it. Yet you faced him. Why did you do it?”

Howard shrugged his shoulders. “You make too much of the affair,” he said, lightly. “The man was strong, but he was past his first youth and moved slowly. After the first two minutes I had no fear of the result. But you ask me why I came forward. What else could any gentleman do—and, in spite of my trial and conviction, I trust I am still a gentleman. I came forward because I had to.”

“Then you did not fight for the poor prize I offered?”

Howard smiled. “Assuredly not,” he answered. “Why, you yourself saw that I was ready to fight again a moment later to avoid taking it!”

“But you took it.”

“Yes—I took it.”

“And now I ask you to give it up again. I—I—Mr. Howard, I have heard of you for two years. You have been painted very black in my eyes. I have known you two weeks, and they have reversed the picture. I should not have looked for generosity in the man I once thought you to be, but I beg it from the man I have found you to be. I am your wife. I have promised before God to be loyal, loving, and obedient to you. I made that promise with my eyes open, and if you ask it I shall try to keep it. I am not of those who take their marriage vows lightly. I am your wife and I am wholly at your mercy. But—but—you do not love me nor I you. We are mere acquaintances. Do not—oh, it is hard for me to say this. Have pity on me. Hold me, not as your wife, as I must hold myself, but as only a poor girl in distress, and—see, I kneel to you——”

Howard caught her hands and drew her to her feet again. "Poor little girl," he murmured gently. "So that is what is troubling you! Do not fear. You are my wife—yes. But it is a tie that can easily be sundered when once we get back to dry land. A marriage like this is no marriage without the after-consent of the parties. Any court in the land would dissolve it—or, more likely, declare it null and void from the beginning. Do not fear. You are quite safe with me."

Dorothy's breath came fast, but she did not speak. She tottered and put her hand out for support. Howard guided her to a chair.

"Sit quietly for a moment," he ordered gently. "I must see Jackson about something, but I will soon be back and help you to your state-room. You must be worn out."

With the last word he turned and went up the companionway, more to give the girl time to recover herself than because

of any desire to see Jackson. As he reached the top of the stairs his foot struck something, and he stooped and picked up a pistol wrapped round with a half-sheet of paper.

Wonderingly he took it to the lamp. He read:

I know where Forbes keeps his rifles. Mrs. Joyce is going to get some of them for us. I'm going back to help. I leave my pistol in case I don't get back. Anyhow, I guess you'd rather be alone to-night.

JACKSON.

P.S.—That was a great match.—J.

Howard laughed bitterly. Then he turned and descended the stairs.

“Jackson has gone on an errand to Mrs. Joyce,” he said. “He left his pistol for you. After what has happened, he thinks, and I think, that you had better be armed. If any man—if *any* man molests you do not hesitate to use it. I believe you told me once that you were rather a good shot.”

It had been no part of Howard's intention to spend the night upon the Queen.

He had no faith in Forbes's protestations of fair play, and felt certain that he would hear from that individual very shortly and in unpleasant fashion. Although he scarcely expected any attack that night, doubting Forbes's ability to bring his men to the fighting point so speedily, he intended to take no chances, and to seek sleeping quarters on some near-by vessel. But Dorothy's fear of himself and her very evident nearness to collapse, taken with Jackson's unexpected departure, had knocked his plans completely on the head.

After Dorothy had retired, he sat up for some time considering the situation. He was terribly sore and wearied from the heart-breaking struggle of the afternoon, which had been nothing like so easy as he had portrayed it to Dorothy. Coming on top of the anxiety of his confinement, in ignorance of what was happening to the girl he had promised to restore to her home, it had nearly worn him out.

The question that presented itself to him was whether he should trust to his belief in Forbes's inability to resume the struggle so quickly, and take his much-needed rest so as to be ready for the probable stress of the morrow, or whether he should remain on watch all night and thereby be less efficient the next day, supposing the contest were put off till then.

Doubts and difficulties lay in each alternative, but he finally decided to sleep while he could, trusting to his life-long ability to awake fully and instantly at the slightest unaccustomed sound. He did not believe that Forbes and his men could steal upon him without waking him; and, in any event, he could not hope, alone and unarmed, to keep them off the ship.

So, after stringing several ropes across the gangway in the deepest shadows of the Queen's deck, he slipped into his state-room, just across the corridor from Dorothy's, and lay down, fully dressed, with an axe—his sole weapon, since he

had given Dorothy Jackson's pistol—close beside him. In an instant he was fast asleep.

He was aroused several hours later by a sound whose cause he had no difficulty in interpreting. Somebody had tripped over one of the ropes he had stretched, and had fallen. Instantly he was on his feet, axe in hand, and was cautiously opening his door. Stillness now reigned, but Howard had no doubt that murder was stalking close at hand.

With infinite precaution he stole from the room, noted that Dorothy's door was still fast, and slipped like a shadow along the corridor. It took him half an hour to gain the other deck, scarcely fifty feet from where he had slept. But when he had done so, he was certain that no foes lurked in his rear.

The moon loomed huge in the cloudless sky as he peered from the door of the social hall. Before him the deck stretched away, silvery-white except where criss-

crossed by the black shadows cast by the stanchions that supported the half-furled awnings, and by the narrow border of shadow cast by the awnings themselves.

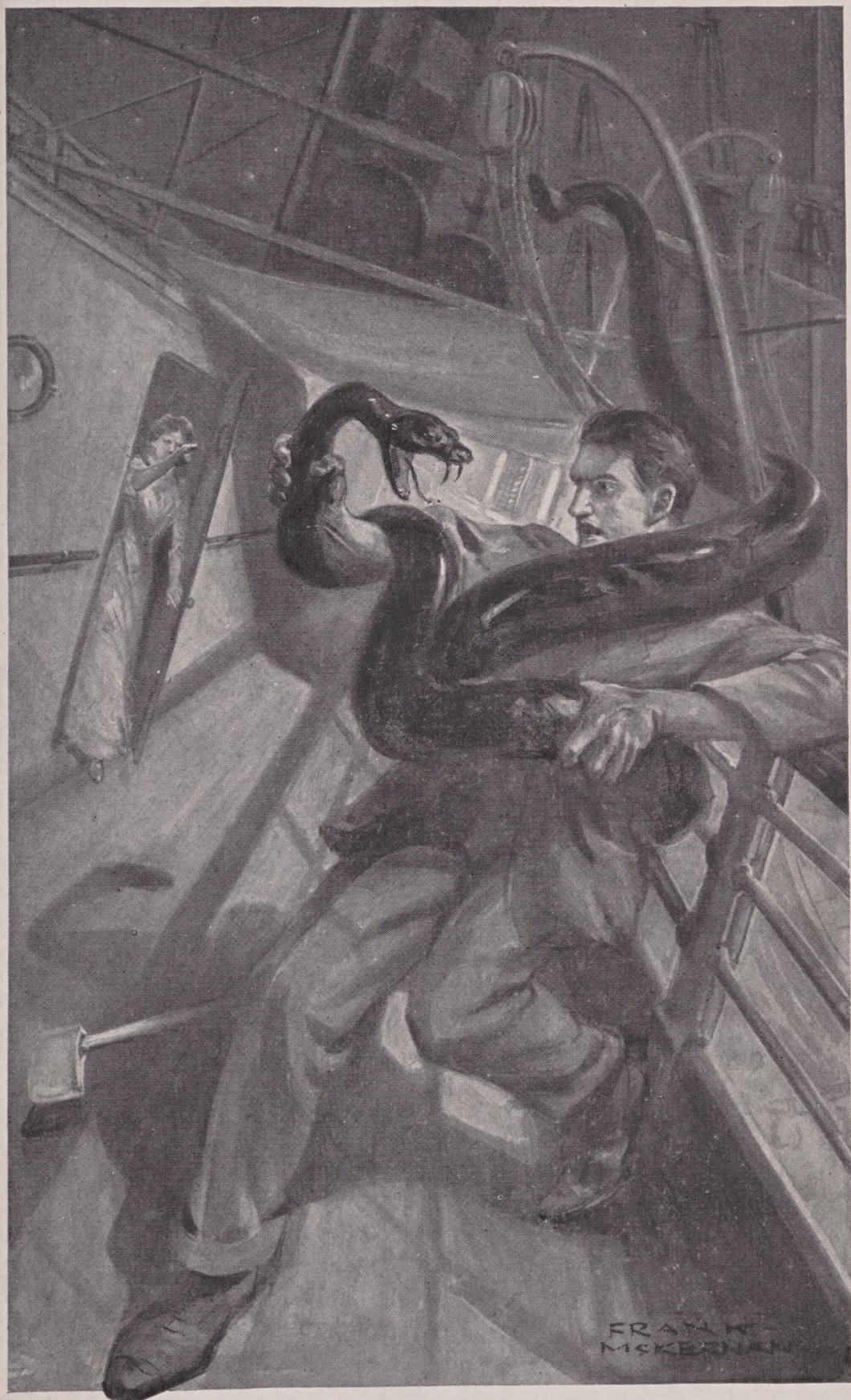
Slowly he crept out into the black border and made his way forward, eager to front the danger, whatever it might be.

But all was still save for a very faint, rustling sound impossible to locate—a sound like dry leaves whisking through a November night; a sound that made Howard's hair stir upon his head. At two o'clock in the morning courage is rare, and never perfect.

Still Howard crept on until he reached a spot where a broken boat-davit was twisted across a stanchion. By this he paused and stood listening.

Then, without warning, the attack came. From the cross-beam overhead something fell upon him with cruel force—something heavy, crushing, deadly; some live thing that wrapped him round and round.

With a half-strangled shriek of terror



THE END COULD NOT BE LONG DEFERRED; YET THE MAN
FOUGHT ON.

he caught himself back against the crossed davit and the stanchion, just in time to involve them in the coiling horror. His right arm, instinctly thrown aloft, grasped vainly at the throat of a huge serpent whose darting head cut fantastic silhouettes against the Milky Way, while its body tightened swiftly about his middle.

Had it not been for the iron rods that shielded him, Howard's first cry would have been his last. To the great snake the resistance of a man's body was as nothing. One unhampered constriction of its mighty coils would have crushed an ox. But the davit and the stanchion stood firm; not for nothing had they been planned to withstand the assaults of the sea. They held firm, while Howard, with starting eyeballs and slowly crushing chest, strove to beat back the forked death that flicked about his face.

The end could not be long deferred; yet the man fought on, as living things

will fight for life—life so common, life so cheap, yet so desperately clung to. He fought and shrieked until the ever-tightening constriction stopped the inflation of his lungs; till the roaring in his ears swelled to thunder; till the driven blood burst from his ears and nostrils.

Then came a flash and a louder roar; the gleaming eyes that confronted him grew suddenly dull; the great coils relaxed and fell away; dimly he saw Dorothy's face; her gown white in the moonlight; the smoking pistol in her hand.

Then girl and snake and moon and sky blended in one common blur of blackness. For the first time in his life Frank Howard fainted.

When he came to, he was lying on the deck, with his head in Dorothy's lap. On his face her tears dropped slowly, one by one. As, dazed, he lay still for an instant, he heard her pray:

"Oh, God! God!" she sobbed, "give him back to me! Give my darling back to me."

A mad throb of exultation crossed through Howard's veins to be followed by a quicker revulsion. "Not yet, oh, God!" he implored in his turn silently. "Not until——"

He opened his eyes and looked up into hers.

The moonlight was white and bright as day, and for one moment each looked deep into the other's heart.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" sobbed the girl. "You're alive! Alive! Alive!"

Howard tried to smile. "Thanks to you," he answered. "It was the bravest act I have ever known. I don't see how ——"

But Dorothy threw up her hand. "Please! Please, don't speak of it!" she implored. "I can't bear it. I can't bear it."

Howard struggled to his feet. He longed to take her in his arms and comfort her, but honor held him back. Perhaps she loved him—yes, but she was overwrought. He could not take advan-

tage of her emotion—nor of her position. Later, when she was restored to her friends—the light died from his eyes as he remembered his own doom.

“Thank you,” he said softly. “It is all that I can say. Thank you.”

Dorothy’s bosom heaved. “No,” she said, “it is not all. You said more while you were unconscious. You were about to say more an instant ago. Then you stopped. Why?”

“I—I——”

“I could read your heart in your eyes. Say what you had in it. Say it! Say it!”

“I am not worthy. I am——”

“Hush! Not that! You are not guilty. You could not be guilty. You! so brave, so tender, so sacrificing! You! to murder a woman. It is not true. Since the day I first met you I have never believed it. Since you told me the story, I have wanted no other testimony. Now, will you say what was in your heart a moment ago?”

“I cannot. I——”

“Listen. To-night I said that we were mere acquaintances. I said I did not love you. I lied! I do love you. With all my heart and soul I love you.”

“Dorothy!”

“Frank! Husband!”

XV

DESPITE the nerve and body-racking experiences of the day before, Howard was up and on deck the next morning at the first peep of day, straining his eyes for sight of Jackson and the Joyces.

The need for instant action was strong upon him. He did not doubt that Forbes had sent the snake upon him, just as (judging from Mother Joyce's tale to Dorothy) he had before sent it against one of Prudence Gallegher's ill-fated husbands, and he only wondered that the doughty captain had not followed up the attack.

"I suppose the fellow didn't know how devilish near he came to succeeding," he muttered to himself grimly. "But he'll bring his men next time, and we must fight or get out of his reach in a hurry. If Jackson and the others were only here!"

But neither Jackson nor the Joyces were there. Strain his eyes as he might, Howard could see no moving figures anywhere on the wreck-pack, and, with an anxious sigh, he turned away to inspect the scene of the last night's encounter.

Half submerged in the weed at the foot of the sloping deck he made out the great body of the snake, terrible even in death, and shuddered as he thought of what would inevitably have been his fate had Dorothy been less courageous or the iron stanchions been less honestly wrought; these last, bent almost double, gave mute but effective evidence of the mighty power of the reptile.

Wishing to save Dorothy, as far as he could, from all reminders of the contest, Howard lowered himself to the water's edge and poked the snake down beneath the weed; then he climbed back to the taff-rail and again searched the horizon for sight of Jackson.

This time his quest was successful. Ap-

proaching over the wreckage, quite near at hand, were four figures. As they drew nearer he recognized Jackson, the minister who had married him the day before, Mother Joyce, and his jailer of the day before. Each of the men carried several rifles over his shoulder, and was girt about with belts of cartridges. Mother Joyce bore a less and indeterminable weight.

At Howard's call, Dorothy came on deck to greet the newcomers. Rosy and smiling, with head erect and sparkling eyes, she looked little like the woebegone maiden who had answered Forbes's call the day before.

Mother Joyce's sharp eyes quickly spied the difference. "Holy mither! What's this?" she cried. "And was it you, miss, that didn't want to marry at all, at all? And was it you that was so sure that you and Mr. Howard could niver be anything to each other? Faith, look at the bright eyes and the blushing cheeks

of her! Sure, Tim, man, it carries me back forty years, so it does!" With a fond look she turned to the man beside her.

"Thru for you, Kathleen, darlint," he replied. "The top of the mornin' to you, ma'am, and may you live a million years and have a hundred——"

"Arrah! Be still with your foolishness, Tim. Sure, you make the young lady blush."

Meanwhile Jackson was explaining matters to Howard. He had, he said, circled round to the other side of the village and lurked there for several hours, waiting his chance. Then he had slipped up on the deck and run directly into Mother Joyce, who promptly whisked him below. "Cap'n Forbes's big snake had got away, and he had gone after it," continued the policeman, "and——"

Howard held up his hand. "It won't get away again," he interjected. "It came here."

“Here?”

Howard nodded. “Yes, it came here,” he repeated. “Came here and attacked me. It was a very intelligent snake—from Forbes’s standpoint. It would have killed me, beyond a doubt, but for Miss Fair—but for my wife. She shot it with your pistol, Jackson. But we haven’t time to talk about it now,” he concluded with some impatience. “Go on with your story.”

Jackson, however, had little more to tell. In Forbes’s absence, it seems, he and the others had had no difficulty in getting at the rifles and ammunition. Further, under Mother Joyce’s direction, he had broken open the captain’s private storeroom and procured a compass, sextant, and a chronometer, which Mother Joyce had declared would enable them to navigate a boat as soon as they found one. “An’,” concluded Jackson, “I think we’d better be findin’ it soon, for Gallagher has gotten out a Gatling gun,

and is making every preparation to do us up for fair."

"I expected something of the sort," said Howard, nodding. "We shall be ready to leave the Queen the moment we have had breakfast. So, now, if you'll come below——"

At the breakfast-table Howard unfolded his plan.

"None of us want to fight if we can help it," he declared. "We haven't anything to gain by it, and everything to lose. And we don't want to stay near here. From all I can learn, Forbes has destroyed all the boats within fifty miles or so, and we must go at least that far away to have any chance of finding one. Now, what I propose is this: We will leave now in a few minutes, but instead of going north along the coast, which is what Forbes will expect us to do, we will go east straight into the pack, make a detour around the village, and come back to the coast to the south. By this means I think

we will outwit him, and can make our preparations in peace. Without a compass, I might have hesitated to go into the depths of the pack, but since Mother Joyce has brought us one, we can afford to risk it. As there will probably be nothing to eat there, we must take food and water enough to carry us through. I have already made up three bundles of these, and it will take only a few moments to prepare three more. Then we can be off."

Ten minutes later the party left the Queen forever. Dorothy's eyes were streaming wet as she looked at the vessel for the last time.

"Frank! Frank!" she murmured. "We've been happy on her, after all. Shall we be equally happy elsewhere? I—I would be glad to stay here with you if—Oh! I know it's impossible, of course. We must go back to the world and clear your name. Yes, we will! We must! God is good. I have confidence in His justice.

He would not have let me love you so much if He didn't mean to clear you."

Hand in hand the two followed the others, already well ahead, plunging straight into the wreck-pack. Howard drew a long breath when they were well away without having seen any sign of Forbes or his companions. Unfortunately, though he saw no one, he did not go unseen. As the little party vanished among the tangle of masts and sails, a man rose from behind a deckhouse, where he had been lurking, and peered after it till certain of its course, then he set off for the village as fast as he could go.

XVI

It is one thing to lay a course even in the open sea, and it is quite another to follow it. Wind, waves, and currents often drive a vessel from the way she wishes to go; and all of these had acted on the wreck-path, seemingly conspiring to make difficult the line of progress that Howard had mapped out. Again and again he had to make long detours to pass some insurmountable wreck that lay across his path, and finally he had to turn aside from it altogether to skirt a narrow but impassable channel of weed-grown water that corkscrewed unexpectedly across his path.

“It’s that hurricane we had a month ago,” explained Joyce. “It isn’t often they come here, but when they do, faith it’s the foine mix-up they make! I moind one of thim ten years ago! It split

the pack for miles back, and filled the hole up again with wrecks that would have made the fortune of a dime-museum man, so they would. The most of them were fair rotten with age, and sank as soon as they began to rub up against the strong new ships. The last storm wasn't so bad, and, belike, it only split the pack here and there."

Howard nodded. The explanation seemed very probable, as in no other way could he account for the open channel in the midst of the vessel-wrecks. Mere mutual attraction ought to have closed it up years before. It made him anxious, for the channel had already led him a mile deeper into the pack than he had intended to go, and still showed no signs of ending.

It might go on even to the heart of the wreckage, where lay the ancient ships on which all food had rotted away centuries before. If a former storm had opened up a channel that far, so might a later one.

That the cases were parallel was soon exhibited with startling proof. For some moments Howard had been noticing a great grey hull, banded with tarnished gold, that loomed across the pack two or three ships ahead. As he drew nearer, he saw, with wonder, its strange architecture. Huge, round-bellied, with castle-like structures reared at stem and stern, it rose about the other wrecks, tier above tier, with lines of frowning ports from which protruded the mouths of old fashioned cannon. No such ship had sailed the ocean for years—not since the days when Spain was in her glory and her rich fleets bore the riches of America to fill her already overflowing coffers. It must have lain screened in the heart of the ship-continent for at least two centuries, to be at last spewed forth in time to meet the curious gaze of an alien race.

From the topgallant poop of a modern sailing-ship, Howard studied it curiously, while behind him the rest of the party looked on with amazement.

“Sure, and that’s the very spirit and image of them I was spakin’ about,” remarked Joyce, triumphantly. “An’ what sort of a ship do you suppose she is, sor?”

“She’s a Spanish galleon, beyond doubt,” rejoined Howard. “She’s the very type of those old treasure-ships. And there are more of the same kind behind her. Look!”

Along the open channel, far away to the sunset, stretched a file of ancient vessels, now in single file, now in double. Not all were galleons, but all plainly belonged to dead and gone ages. While the others of their kind had long ago perished from human sight, here, in this lost corner of the world, these had lingered on, slowly decaying, like the once mighty nation that sent them forth. Howard stared at them in wondering amaze.

But Joyce recalled him to himself. “Did you say treasure, sor?” he insinuated.

Howard laughed. "Oh, yes," he answered, indifferently. "She's a treasure-ship, all right, though that isn't to say that she has treasure aboard. Still, it's not unlikely. There may be a million apiece for all of us on her—if we could only carry it away. Hold on! Where are you going?"

Joyce was already climbing through one of the open ports of the galleon, but at Howard's call he paused. "Sure, an' I'm going to look after that million," he returned, defiantly.

Howard hesitated. Then he noticed a restless movement of the missionary and eager glances by the two women and laughed. "Go ahead and look for it," he said. "But be careful. Remember the ship must be rotten through and through; I doubt whether her decks will bear your weight."

Joyce disappeared, but a moment later stuck his head out of the port again. "She's better nor she looks, sor," he

averred. "The planks are rotten, but I think they'll hold. Perhaps your good lady would like to come aboard."

Howard glanced at Dorothy.

"His good lady certainly would," she smiled back. A moment later all stood on one of the galleon's many decks.

Joyce was right. The deck, though rotted, seemed to be reasonably sound, and the stairway leading upward did not give way when Jackson mounted it. As he was the heaviest in the party, the rest felt safe in following him.

Once on the upper deck, the cause of the ship's plight was evident. All about her, tumbled in inextricable confusion, lay the bones of men mingled with the rust-eaten remains of guns and pikes and sabres. In some places, doubtless where the nameless fight had raged most fiercely, the skeletons were heaped high upon each other. Flesh and clothing alike had long since disappeared, but parts of belts and buckles and fragments of the tinsel

of war remained to tell of the bitterness of the fight.

“Probably the work of buccaneers,” explained Howard. “They did not hesitate to attack ten times their number, and often won by the very fury of their assault. Evidently they did this time. Joyce, I’m afraid your million went to make a pirate holiday centuries ago.”

“Bad cess to thim, whoiver they were. But where would it be, sor, if it was on board?”

“I really don’t know. And yet—the hold under the captain’s cabin, aft there, would be a likely place. Suppose you look there.”

Joyce and Jackson hurried away, and soon the sound of dull hammering and the tear of rending wood came to the ears of the others, followed a moment later by a series of triumphant yells. Then Joyce appeared, fairly mad with excitement.

“Hurroush! Hurroush!” he screamed.

“We’ve found it! We’ve found it! Tons and tons of solid gold! Kathleen, *ma-vourneen*, we’re rich—we’re rich! We’ll go back to Galway and buy the little place beyant the hill, and——”

“Whist! Whist! Tim, man! An’ will you first be tellin’ me how you’re going to get yerself away, let alone your tons of gold?”

So absorbed was the party in the discovery of the gold that they forgot everything else—the danger from Forbes, the utter uselessness of the treasure, the necessity of crossing the channel and making their way to the southern coast. Even Dorothy, used to wealth as she was, caught the infection, and babbled away as excitedly as a child.

Howard was the first to recover his poise and to plan for the future. It was, he knew, utterly hopeless to try to tear Joyce and Jackson, or even the missionary away from the galleon until their excitement had spent itself. Indeed, he

himself felt positively ill at thought of abandoning the gold, unavoidable as such action undoubtedly was. By rough calculation, he estimated that there were twelve tons of the treasure, worth about six million dollars, under their very feet, free for them to carry away, and yet as utterly unavailable as so much sand. Indeed, in so far as unwillingness to leave it should delay movements of the party, it was a positive detriment.

He turned and looked at the others. Joyce, Jackson, the missionary, and even Mother Joyce, were working as they had never worked before, taking from the hold the golden bars, each a load for a strong man, and staggering on deck with them in their arms. In vain, Howard tried to check them; they only glared at him, cursed, and hurried back for another load. Joyce and his wife, too old for such labor, soon had to give way, crying like children as they did so; but the others toiled on, hot, black with the grime of ages, half ill from the smells

of the shut, musty hold. Their muscles cracked; their backs ached; the sweat streamed down their faces, but still they kept on.

Sick at heart, Howard turned from the scene and wandered to the side of the galleon, where he stood, looking east, hoping the end of the zigzag channel might be somewhere in sight. In vain! As far as his eyes could serve, it stretched away.

Disappointed, his glance dropped to the open water of the channel close at hand, and he stood transfixed. Close beside the galleon, moored strongly fore and aft, lay a slender, queer-shaped boat about sixty feet long. It needed not the trained knowledge of the naval officer to tell that it was a submarine.

Intensely modern in its lines, it was as much out of place in that ancient company as would be a rifle in the hands of Cæsar's legionaries. Howard's mouth fairly dropped open as he gazed at it.

But in a moment understanding came. This was the means of escape that Forbes had spoken of: safe, quick, and easy for one with the necessary technical knowledge; the gold on the galleon was part of the fortune that he wanted to get home in safety. No wonder he had been eager to enlist Howard's aid; and he could have had it—had it all, if he had not presumed on his power to grasp the girl, too! Now he would lose all.

Dorothy had tired of the gold and was standing on the deck, looking wonderingly around. Howard called her, and together they descended to the lower deck of the galleon, and, slipping out through a port opposite to that by which they had entered, stepped easily out upon the deck of the submarine, which floated high in the water. With trembling fingers, Howard pushed back the bolts that held the manhole cover in place, lifted it off, and peered into the darkness of the interior. "I'll be back in a moment," he promised,

glancing up at Dorothy as he swung himself downward.

Soon he was back again with radiant features. "She's in perfect condition, so far as I can tell without starting the engines," he announced, "and I guess they are all right. She's almost the latest type in submarines—gas-engine for running at the surface, and an electric motor for use below. Her oil-tanks are full, and she has an extra supply in glass jars and plenty of other necessary stores. Unless there's something wrong about her that I can't see, she'll get us all to land without the least difficulty."

"Where did she come from?"

"Straight from heaven, I guess. At least, I can't imagine how else she got into the sea. No, stop! I believe—Yes, by George, that's it. Maybe you remember that a Spanish cruiser was lost at sea two or three years ago—disappeared in a big storm and was never heard of again? If I remember rightly, she had

a submarine on board. This may be it. Yes! See! Here's its name—Tiburon; that's Spanish for Seashark. That cruiser must have drifted in here with it on board."

"But where is she? How did this boat get here—to this very place?"

"I don't know, but I can guess. Forbes must have brought it here. He threw out hints about such a boat the first time I talked with him. Yes, he must have brought it here. How he managed it I don't know, and I don't much care. The boat is ours now by that same law of salvage by which he claimed the Queen and her contents. What's sauce for the goose will do for the gander. But think how marvellous it is that we should have come here, straight as a homingbird—to here! the exact place where he had left his gold and his boat. And, yet, after all, it is not quite so marvellous as it seems, since he could hardly have kept her anywhere except up this channel, and we have been following the line of it for miles."

“Can we get away on her?”

“Certainly! All of us, and more, too, if necessary.”

“But how will we get through the weed?”

“We won’t go through it. We’ll go under it. The weed isn’t thick, you know—only a few feet at most; it grows on top of the water, which is two miles deep here, and we’ll simply dive under it.”

Dorothy shuddered. “Go under the water, you mean?” she questioned. “Oh! Frank, is it safe?”

“Safe? Surely! I have been down many a time in boats much like this. Of course—I won’t deceive you—accidents are always possible, but there is really little risk, if the machinery works well. And we can’t tell about that till we try. Don’t be afraid, dear. God has been too good to us to let it all come to naught now.”

“I’m not afraid, Frank. I’m not afraid anywhere with you, my king of men.”

Howard had something to say to this, but it is scarcely worth setting down; lovers' confidences seldom are. By and by he started up. "I'm afraid we're as mad one way as those people on the galleon are in another," he smiled. "I'm wasting valuable time that should be used in getting you out of this before Forbes finds us. He's sure to be looking up this place very soon."

A thought struck Dorothy. "Oh, those poor people!" she exclaimed. "Can't you take some of their gold for them, Frank? A little money will mean so much to the Joyces. They are too old to go to work again, and——"

"It would come in rather handy with me, too. But I don't see— By George! Yes, I think I do! Let's look." He dived down again into the body of the submarine and soon reappeared, his face radiant.

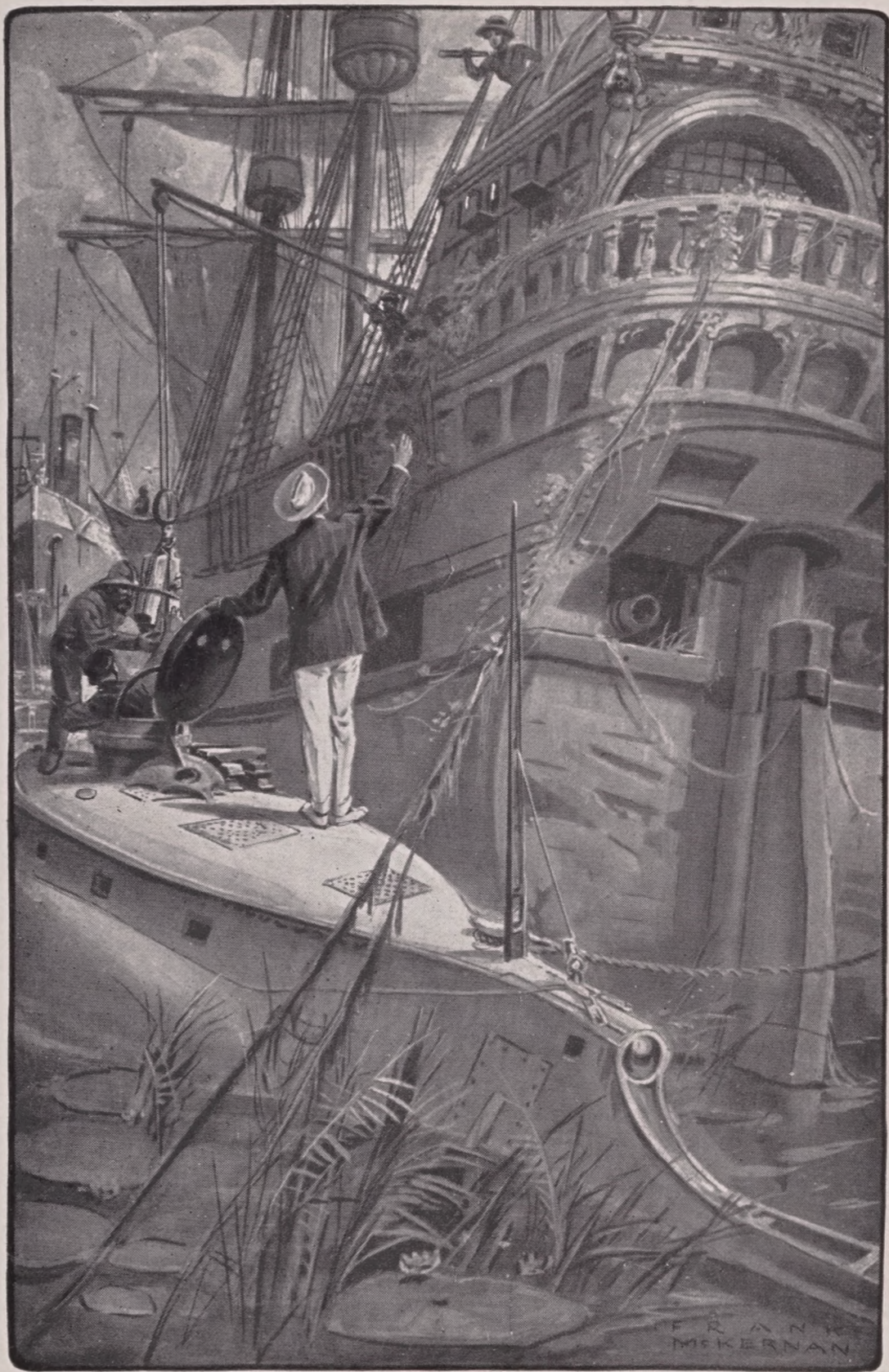
"There is about five tons of detachable lead ballast in the bottom," he cried,

joyously. "We can take it out, and put gold in its place—two million dollars' worth. If you will wait here. I'll go and tell the others. Maybe they are tired enough to listen to reason now."

They were! Howard found them all sitting glumly on the deck of the galleon, glaring despairingly at the great pile of gold bars they had extracted from the hold. One by one they had dropped their loads and sank down where they stood, when, with increasing weariness, the situation had at last dawned upon them. When Howard approached, they did not heed him further than to cast savage glances in his direction. Then they returned to contemplation of the gold.

Howard understood the situation without words. "You oughtn't to have worked so hard," he observed, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You, especially, Joyce. And you, Mrs. Joyce. You'll feel this to-morrow. But now that you have gotten all the gold up here, I'm glad to tell

you that I've got a boat outside that will carry us, and just about this much gold besides—say a third of a million for each of us. The rest, I'm afraid, we'll have to abandon."



IT TOOK ONLY ABOUT TWO HOURS TO DUMP THE LEAD OUT OF THE SUBMARINE AND REPLACE IT WITH THE GOLD.

XVII

FIVE tons of gold, worth about three million dollars, is not near so hard to move as five tons of coal, for instance, especially when it is put in seventy-five pound bars and there is plenty of tackle handy. It took Jackson, Joyce, and Willoughby only about two hours to dump the lead out of the submarine and replace it with the gold—surely the richest ballast the world ever saw.

Meanwhile Howard, after stationing Dorothy and Mother Joyce in elevated positions where they could watch for the possible approach of Forbes and his men, had set to work to get the submarine into order, oiling the machinery, testing the engines and all the various pumps and motors, and finally starting the gas-engine, which discharged the double duty of driving the boat while on the surface,

and of charging the electric accumulators for use below. All this took time, and was not finished until after the last bar of gold had been stored away in place.

Then Howard called the others around him. "Before we start," he said, "I have something to tell you. Until now I have kept it to myself, because I did not want to rouse any false hopes. Joyce, did you ever hear of wireless telegraphy?"

Joyce scratched his head. "And what's that, sor?" he demanded.

"Telegraphy without the aid of wires. I didn't suppose any of you here had ever heard of it, else Captain Forbes would certainly not have shut me in the operating-room of a steamer that had a full outfit in perfect working order. During the time I was confined there I was in constant communication with the naval station at Guantanamo. I told them of our plight, and I will venture to say that

the papers of the country are ringing with the story of the Sargasso Sea colony and with our personal adventures. Toward the end—just before Joyce set me free—I got into communication with your father, Dorothy. He was wild with delight to know that you were alive and was about to start to rescue you. In fact, half a dozen vessels are probably now making an effort to break a way through the weed to aid us. If we can get back to the coast and wait, we are tolerably sure to be taken off sooner or later. Now, the question is whether we shall wait or not?”

Joyce and his wife had listened in dazed silence. “Do you mane, sor,” demanded the former, “that you can talk through the air with those quare instruments in that little room?”

“That’s it exactly, Joyce. I can, and I did. But let me get back to the point. I could give our friends only a very doubtful approximation of our latitude

and longitude, so that it may take them a long time to find us, if they ever do. Not hearing further from us, they may conclude that the whole thing is a fake and give up the search. They will certainly have a long and tedious battle with the weed. Altogether, if they get anywhere near the right spot in less than a month it will be most surprising. Certainly they will not in less than two weeks. Now, what can we do during the interval? If we decide to wait for them, we must run down the coast and establish a camp somewhere—as far from the village as we can get. Perhaps I can find another wireless outfit and get into communication with Guantanamo again. Certainly, we can find food and shelter, and all we will have to do will be to wait—supposing that Forbes doesn't find us, which he will move heaven and earth to do when he finds we have his gold and his boat."

"That is one alternative open to us. The other, of course, is to dive under

the weed and start for home at once. If we meet one of the searching steamers, all right; if we don't, we can get to port under our own power. There is a risk about such an attempt, of course, but I don't think it's a very great one. Now, this is the situation: what shall we do?"

Howard paused, and the others looked at each other doubtfully. Finally, Mr. Willoughby cleared his throat. "I confess," he observed hesitatingly, "that I fear the depths of the sea. I should much prefer to remain on top of it and go home in a steamer. May we not run down this—er—river on the surface and talk it over as we go?"

"Surely. That's good sense. We'll do it. Joyce, suppose you run up on the galleon and take a last look for Captain Forbes. Meanwhile, everybody else get aboard. Hurry, Joyce!"

Joyce hurried. In five minutes he came racing back as fast as his legs would carry him. "The cap'n's comin'," he

cried. "Coming with his whole force. He isn't three ships away."

Howard smiled grimly. "Just too late," he exclaimed. "On board with you, Joyce! Quick! Off we go!" With the word, he cast loose the last mooring, and the Seashark moved slowly away.

As, with gathering headway she rounded the galleon's high-decked poop, she came in view of a dozen or more armed men, who were rapidly clambering over the wrecks, and who burst into excited babble as they spied the little vessel. An instant later Forbes appeared.

"Curse you!" he shrieked. "I'll get you yet." He threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired, his men following suit with a scattering volley.

But at the first sign of hostilities, Howard, who was alone on deck, dropped nimbly down inside the body of the Seashark, and remained, steering by aid of the camera lucida put there for the purpose, until a curve in the channel shel-

tered the little vessel from the bullets that had pattered harmlessly around her.

For an hour the Seashark dropped swiftly down the slowly widening channel between ever-changing banks of massed ships. In that hour she passed in review the shipping of more than two centuries. Squat-bellied, round-bowed Dutchmen, high-pooped Spaniards, clippers that had made the American flag famous, frigates shot-torn and shattered in the American Civil War, deep-water ships still bearing the indelible imprint of the Chinese trade, steamers old and new—one by one they passed in a progression constantly growing more and more modern. Howard, alone in the conning-tower, glanced at them with wonder; never before had they so impressed him. Until then, nearness had obscured the vastness of the ruin, and only now had the full meaning of it all been hammered into his mind.

But he resolutely threw off the spell, and concentrated his entire attention on

the navigation of his little vessel. It was very necessary. The channel, being newly formed, was reasonably clear of weed, but it was impossible to guess how soon its character might change. The smallest patch of vegetation might foul the screw of the Seashark, or might conceal a water-logged spar, floating just awash, that would rip a plate from her bow and send her to the bottom, ending at once the lives of the castaways and their dreams of fortune. In some ways it would be safer beneath the water; yet Howard knew that every turn of the gas-engines was aiding to store up power in the electric accumulators, on which alone they must depend when the time came to dive. He did not dare to go below an instant sooner than he must.

After an hour the channel opened more rapidly, and the weed began to thicken, showing that the edge of the wreck-pack was near. Soon the accumulation grew so thick that it was no longer safe to push

through it. Howard glanced at the indicators that measured the power accumulated. "Enough to run us three and a half hours," he murmured, "or perhaps four. At eight knots, that means about twenty-five miles of distance. Twenty-five miles! Humph! I guess it's safe."

He brought the boat to a stop, and spoke to those in the semi-darkness below.

"Well," he queried, "have you decided? Is it go ahead, or land and wait?"

No one answered, and in the stillness he heard up-channel the far-off chug-chug of a boat rapidly driven. "Humph!" he exclaimed, bending down again. "Forbes seems to have been well supplied with boats. He's after us in a steam-launch. That settles the question definitely. We've got to dive. If any one wants to take a last look at this marvellous place, now is the time."

No one spoke.

Howard laughed. "What!" he exclaimed. "Nobody? Joyce, don't you

want to see the last of your old home?"

Joyce shook his head. "Faith," he answered, "I've seen enough of it to do me for the rest of my life."

"Jackson?"

"New York's good enough for me."

"Mr. Willoughby?"

The missionary looked up. "Man! Man!" he cried. "How can you think of such things when we are about to plunge into uttermost peril of our lives? Rather, let us pray."

"Pray by all means, Mr. Willoughby. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of, you know. Dorothy, don't you want to look?"

But Dorothy, too, shook her head. "No, Frank," she answered. "I never want to see the horrible place again."

"Then down we go. Here comes Forbes, by the way."

Around a curve, up-channel, appeared a steam-launch, still far off, but rapidly approaching. Howard stood up and

waved his hand sarcastically; then, with rapid motions, snapped on the manhole cover, cut off the gas-engine, and threw on the electric starting-lever. Then, as the little vessel started forward, he turned the diving-rudder downward.

Instantly the Seashark slid gracefully down beneath the ripples. From her little turret sprang out a sword of white light that pierced the water before her, while within a score of tiny bulbs illumined the darkness. Down she went; down, down, till the gage at Howard's hand showed that a depth of fifty feet had been attained; then slowly he shifted the diving rudders until the boat held steadily to her depth, the rudders just balancing her tendency to rise to the surface. "All set," he called down cheerily, but without moving his gaze from the front. "Nothing to do now but go ahead. Make yourselves comfortable. We won't come to the surface for three hours, and perhaps longer."

No one answered. The experience, utterly new to them all, was sufficiently terrifying to destroy the desire for conversation. Shut up in this tiny shell which might any moment prove their tomb, fifty feet below the surface of the ocean, driving forward blindly into the unknown, it would have taken one braver—or more callous—than any there to make merry. Howard, used as he was to submarine work, might have cheered them up, had he not been compelled to give all his attention to driving the vessel.

For the dangers, though not what the rest vaguely conceived, were by no means imaginary. Let the Seashark rise a few feet above the level at which she ran, and she might easily smash herself against a more than ordinarily deeply sunken wreck. Let her plunge too deeply, and the increased pressure of the water might force its way in at some weak spot, and crush her like an egg-

shell. Let her power give out too soon, at a spot where she could not come to the surface to run her gas-engine, and so replenish her accumulators, and they would all perish miserably. On Howard rested all the responsibility, and he had no time to give to anything else.

XVIII

ONE, two, three hours slid by, and, at last, Howard, his eyes fixed on the gage of the accumulators, saw that the power was getting low, and began to watch anxiously for some gleam of light that, striking down through the water, might show a break in the mantle of weed overhead. In vain! Everywhere blackness ruled. Several times he slowed down and turned off the headlight, hoping that, with its effulgence removed, he might see the longed-for gap. After each attempt he went back to driving the Seashark along at her maximum eight miles an hour.

This could not last forever. Rapidly his anxiety grew. The Seashark had been beneath the water for four hours, and his accumulators were nearly bare. To try to break through the weed was dangerous, but not more so than to re-

main below until all the power was gone. At all risks they must reach the surface.

For a scant ten minutes longer Howard held on, now very close beneath the mantle of weed, then stopped altogether, and waited for the reserve buoyancy of the Seashark to carry her upward.

Slowly she rose again, and then into the weed. Howard could see its slimy fronds through the thick glass of the conning-tower. Slowly and more slowly it seemed to brush downward as the Seashark worked herself upward. Slowly and more slowly until all motion ceased, leaving the vessel still far below the surface.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Howard pulled a lever, and in quick response came the throb of the pumps beneath him as with powerful strokes they drove out the water ballast and made the Seashark lighter.

Under this new impulse she rose once more, little by little, until at last the

pumps sucked dry and motion ceased once more. Howard, peering upward, saw the light faintly gleaming through the interstices of the weed. The surface could be scarcely a yard overhead.

“Only a yard.” Howard muttered the words bitterly. “Only a yard! Might as well be a thousand!” Gently he started the propeller; half a dozen revolutions he knew would hopelessly foul it; but little difference that would make if the Sea-shark could work her way upward by its aid. Now forward, now backward he drove it, with his heart in his mouth.

Not for long, for the drag on the shaft soon warned him that to go on would shatter the machinery and, even if they reached the surface, leave them helpless far within the bounds of the weedy sea. With a sudden impulse he stopped the engine, and waited to see whether time might not do what machinery had failed to accomplish.

Half an hour passed, and the same

frond of weed that had lain across his view at its beginning still held its place. The Seashark was stationary.

One desperate recourse remained, and Howard prepared to take it. He swung down into the cabin where sat the rest of the party forlornly waiting. Long before they had realized that something was desperately wrong; but none of them, except perhaps the missionary, were of the weak-kneed type, and none had moved to question Howard, even during the age-long interval when he had sat in silence.

Howard looked at them one by one, his eyes lingering fondly on Dorothy's flower-like face. "Friends all," he said, quietly, "our situation is most serious. I knew when we dived that in about four hours we must come to the surface to run our gas-engine and recharge our electric batteries. I hoped and believed that in four hours we would come to a place where there were breaks in the weed, or

where it was so thin that we could rise through it. Neither has turned out to be true. There are no breaks, and the weed is so thick that it holds us down. I have expelled all the water-ballast, and the Seashark is now very buoyant; yet it cannot rise to the surface. We are scarcely a foot below it, but we can rise no higher.

“The explanation is evident. The Seashark is nearly fifty feet long. Probably she intercepted a score of cables of weed as she rose. No doubt there is now a whaleback of sargassum standing above the water just over her. Its weight must be very great—too great for even our increased buoyancy to lift farther; while the cables across us prevent the weed from slipping off. The only way to get to the surface—that is to say, the only way to save all our lives, is to cut away the cables that hold us down.”

Howard ceased speaking, but no one moved. With the failing power, the

electric lights had grown perceptibly dimmer, and the *voyageurs* could barely see each other's faces. Soon, it was evident, the lights would go out altogether.

"Obviously," Howard resumed, "we cannot cut the cables from inside the ship. They can only be reached from the outside by some one who will leave the boat.

"Fortunately, this last is not difficult. On the open sea it is even easy. The Seashark is a torpedo boat, fitted to discharge torpedoes under water. Time and again the crew of an injured submarine have escaped—all but one—by getting into the torpedo tube and being fired out by a moderate charge of compressed air. Here in the weed it will be more difficult, of course, but not especially dangerous. So"—the speaker paused and looked around him—"so if one of you will come and touch me off, I'll see what I can do toward cutting those confounded cables."

As Howard's voice died away, the

electric lights went suddenly out, and a gasp of sheer horror ran through the tiny cabin. For a moment no one spoke; then Dorothy groped her way through the blackness to Howard's side.

"Not you! not you, my husband!" she murmured. "Not you. Let me go."

Howard laughed gently as he caressed the unseen face. "Not likely, dear," he answered.

The strident voice of the missionary broke through the gloom. "And if you are drowned in the attempt, what will the rest of us do?" he demanded.

"If I fail, another must try. But I won't fail."

"Even if that other succeed, what good will it do us? No one but you can run this boat, and we would only exchange death down here for death on the surface. No, Mr. Howard, you must not go. I will go."

"You."

"Yes! I." If the missionary smiled

bitterly, no one saw it in the darkness. "Oh! I know you all think I am a coward, and perhaps I am. Certainly, I did not dare to oppose Captain Forbes, nor to—— But never mind. I can swim like a fish almost. It is my one manly accomplishment. I can get through the weed if any man can—and if I fail, you will have lost nothing. Come! show me what to do."

Howard groped his way to the missionary, and wrung his hand. "I beg your pardon. Mr. Willoughby," he said, simply, "I misunderstood you. I accept your offer. Come."

"Wait a moment." Dorothy's soft voice sounded. "I want to thank you, Mr. Willoughby, and tell you that I never thought hard of you about Captain Forbes. He was a terrible man. Can—— can I do anything in—in case you don't come back?" Her voice trailed sobbingly off.

"Nothing. I haven't a chick or a child

in the world, and—God bless you, my dear.” With a last pressure of her hand he turned away. “Come, Mr. Howard,” he commanded.

In Cimmerian gloom the two men felt their way to the torpedo port. “Better take off all your clothes,” counselled Howard. “The least thing may serve to hold you in the weed. Strap this knife tightly to your arm so you will be sure not to lose it. Carry this smaller one between your teeth. Don’t lose your head; if you get entangled, keep cool and cut yourself free. When you get to the surface look for the lump of weed above us; it will be conspicuous enough. Cut first at one end of the boat, and then at the other, so that we can rise on an even keel. Now, if you are ready, climb in head-first.”

The ten minutes that elapsed after Howard had “fired off” the missionary were the longest that any of the party had ever known. Beneath the water, beneath

the weed, in darkness so intense that it positively weighed, each waited in silence the results of the venture on which, in all human probability, depended his or her chance for life. For if Mr. Willoughby, comparatively small, agile, and a good swimmer, could not get through the interlacing weed, the chances were that none of the others could do so.

Bearing Mr. Willoughby's clothes, Howard had groped his way back to the conning-tower, and to Dorothy's side, and had found her on her knees. "Oh! Frank! Frank!" she sobbed. "Let us pray for him. Frank! Frank!" Howard sank beside her, and no more fervent petition than his was ever wafted to the throne of grace.

Slowly the minutes ticked themselves away. Then, just as hope seemed gone, the Seashark gave a sudden lurch, and a gasp of relief arose. It required no expert to tell her passengers that something was happening above the water—a something that could have but one cause.

Howard explained it: "Mr. Willoughby has cut one of the cables that are holding us down—there goes another—and another." A faint light showed through the grass-filled peep-holes of the conning-tower; promise of the glorious burst to come. "We are rising. We are tearing free."

Rapidly the light grew, until a tiny beam from the westering sun shot straight through a window, and danced gaily about as the Seashark rocked to and fro on the smooth surface. At sight of it the women sobbed aloud. What the men did in the darkness can only be guessed.

Rapidly Howard threw back the cover of the manhole, and let the blessed air of heaven in. Instantly Mr. Willoughby's head appeared. "Have you got my clothes there?" he demanded in a stage whisper.

With a snicker of relief, Howard passed up the clothes and, when the mis-

sionary was properly arrayed, called all the rest to come on deck.

The Seashark was floating in the familiar ocean of weed. No open water was in sight; if any was near it was not visible from a point so low in the water. Wreckage floated here and there; not a hundred yards away was the hulk of a dismasted water-logged lumber schooner, and a little farther off were the tangled spars of a huge ship.

Howard looked around him and shook his head. "It's farther to clear water than I had thought," he told Dorothy. "Not that it matters. We'll be out tomorrow morning." He turned to the rest. "Joyce! if you and Jackson will cut away the weed from around our propeller, I'll do the rest. Mr. Willoughby will give you his knives. By the way, don't lay them down on the water, or they'll be a mile or so deep when we want them again."

Joyce turned to Willoughby, who

blushed. "I—I'm afraid that's just what I did do, Mr. Howard," he explained, confusedly. "Anyway, I've lost one of the two you gave me."

"No matter, sir, I've got another," interjected Joyce, as he and Jackson turned to their allotted task.

Left to himself, Howard threw the screw-shaft out of connection, and turned the full power of the gas-engine to recharging the electric accumulators. When all was running smoothly, he turned to the rest.

"It will be several hours, at best, before we can start, and I think, on the whole, we had better not do so until toward daylight, so as to be sure of plenty of light when we come up again. If you girls will get supper ready, we might as well dine."

Dinner—or supper—began light-heartedly enough on the part of most of the party. Civilization seemed very near, and the spirits of the majority were high

accordingly. Only Howard, to whom rescue meant something very different from what it did to the others, and Dorothy, who grieved in sympathy with him, were silent and distrait. Toward the end of the meal, Jackson, who had been unwontedly talkative, suddenly awoke to the realization that the time was rapidly approaching when he must again become the jailer of the man who had saved his life and his happiness. Under this incubus he suddenly shut up.

The other three did not understand Howard's situation. For some reason Forbes, it seemed, had not told his information (or suspicions), about the naval officer, and his single reference to them, at the time of the wedding, had passed over the heads of both the Joyces and of Mr. Willoughby. So they chattered on light-heartedly enough, until the meal was over, and Howard dismissed them to sleep.

A little later that night, when all the

rest were sleeping, worn out by the excitement and arduous labors of the day, Dorothy slipped up on deck, where Howard was watching the dials of his accumulators as they slowly crept toward the maximum.

There was no moon, but the phosphorescence of the weed filled the air with a weird witch-light, in which the Sea-shark and floating wreckage bulked black. So strong was the gleam that Howard could see the dark circles under Dorothy's eyes as she sank down by his side.

"There, there! sweetheart," he whispered, gently. "You ought to be getting your beauty sleep. We'll probably be picked up to-morrow, and you must look your best."

But Dorothy refused to heed the badinage. "Oh! Frank, Frank," she murmured, miserably. "I don't want to be picked up. Can't—can't we put the rest ashore somewhere, and slip away—just you and I. When I think of what will

happen—— Oh, Frank, I can't bear it!"

Howard drew her toward him, and tilted up her face until he could look down into her troubled eyes. "Don't be afraid, dear," he murmured, "everything is going to come out right. It will take a little time perhaps, but it will all come right in the end. The Providence that has watched over us and brought us through so much will not fail us now."

"But—but—to have you in prison, even for a day! Oh, Frank, I can't bear it! You have saved Mr. Jackson's life, rescued him, made him rich—surely he will not be cruel enough to——"

"Hush! Hush! dear. Jackson must do his duty. I wouldn't have him fail in it on my account for the world. Besides, I must surrender in order to prove my innocence. Before, I did not have the money to send to Porto Rico for witnesses; now I have. There must be plenty of people down there who have seen the real husband of that poor Dolores Mon-

toro. Money will bring them to New York. Once they see me they will know that I am not he—even though they may have identified my photograph. I ran away before only because I knew of no other way to reach them. Now that I have another way, I must take it.”

Dorothy was thoughtful for a moment. Then she nodded slowly. “You are right, Frank,” she murmured. “You always are. It will break my heart, but—it is the only way. I see that. It isn’t only your liberty I want; your honor must be cleared as well.”

“There’s my brave girl!”

Soon Dorothy spoke again. “Frank,” she said, “tell me! How did you escape from prison? I don’t understand.”

Howard hesitated. Then: “I can’t tell you very much about it, dear. But this I will say: An officer on my last ship—one, too, for whom I am ashamed to say I had never cared much—stood my friend all through the trial, and at the end aided me to get away. He——”

“It was Mr. Loving! I know it was Mr. Loving!”

“Hush! Even the sea-weed has ears. You must never say anything about it, or it would get him into terrible trouble. Yes, it was Loving. Do you know him?”

Dorothy twisted and untwisted her fingers. “Yes,” she murmured. “I know him. It—it was on his account that I went to Porto Rico.”

“On his account?”

“Yes. He—he wanted to marry me, and father wanted me to accept him, and I couldn’t. I couldn’t! I knew you must exist somewhere, Frank—you—the only man in the world for me—and I ran away from New York to avoid him. You are not angry, are you, Frank?”

“Angry! At what? But I’m afraid I’ve made a terrible botch of things; saddled a convict husband on you, and robbed my best friend of his bride.”

Dorothy raised her hand to his lips. “Hush! dear,” she said. “I wouldn’t

exchange my husband for any man in the wide world; and as for Mr. Loving—well, he couldn't be robbed of what he never had, and never could have had."

The note of the engines suddenly changed, and Howard, bending over, glanced at the accumulator dial. "The battery is fully charged, dear," he said, as he shut off the engine. "And it is certainly time to rest."

XIX

LONG before dawn Howard was astir. Possessing in an eminent degree the not very rare faculty of being able to awake at any hour desired, he had set his mental alarm-clock for four o'clock, and, in spite of his fatigue, had awakened within fifteen minutes of that time.

Without disturbing any of the others, who lay stretched in more or less uneasy postures on the comfortless floor of the Seashark, he made his way first to the conning-tower for a last examination of the fixtures there; then to the deck, where a brief inspection showed that the propeller was still clear; and, at last, to the pilot's seat, where, taking his place, he pulled the lever that let the water into the ballast tanks.

Swiftly the tanks filled, and silently and smoothly the Seashark sank down

through the water. For a time the weed scraped against her sides, but soon this ceased, and the electric beam showed only black water before the tiny windows of her conning-tower. When fifty feet of depth was registered on the gage, Howard turned on the power and, gathering way, the Seashark drove along beneath the sea.

Three hours later, when the weary sleepers began to stir, he was still at his post, tirelessly staring before him. As the day waxed, a faint light, interspersed with occasional stronger beams, filtered down from above, giving token that the canopy of weed had grown thin, and was broken here and there by channels of open water. Soon it would be safe to go to the surface.

Suddenly, with terrifying swiftness, came a sound and a shock that shook the Seashark from stem to stern. Simultaneously the black hull of a great ship showed across the path, not a hundred

feet away. There was no time to stop; no time to check the speed; scarcely time to deflect the course. But quicker than thought, quicker than lightning, automatically, Howard's trained brain and hand met the danger.

The horizontal rudders sent the Seashark diving down, down, down, in a desperate endeavor to pass beneath the obstruction—down till Howard saw clear water in front of him.

Under the keel of the ship sped the Seashark, still diving desperately. For one agonizing instant she touched, scraped, shrieked; then tore free.

But the danger was not passed; though, with reversed rudders, the Seashark strove to beat her way upward. A glance at the dials showed that the depth was increasing—not diminishing; a glance behind showed that the black hull was ominously close. The slant of the Seashark grew steeper, steeper; almost it stood on end. The rumble of falling

objects came from below, followed by startled shrieks, as the sleepers, rudely awakened, slid in a tangled heap to the after-end of the boat. Howard clung wildly to the steering-wheel to save himself from being hurled down upon the rest. As he clung, confused, not understanding, the tiny vessel was shaken like a rat in a dog's jaws. Her machinery began to tear loose from its bed. Mere peas in a pod, her passengers tumbled right and left as willed by the mighty power that grasped them.

After turmoil peace. Howard pulled his dazed wits together to the realization that the Seashark was lying quiescent on the surface of the water, though by no means on an even keel. Her engines had stopped, and her lights were out. Only a faint glimmer through the windows of the conning-tower illumined the scene of wreckage around him. Wild with anxiety, he lowered himself into the blackness of the sleeping room, and called Dorothy's name.

“Here I am, Frank,” came the answer.

Howard groped his way toward the sound. “Are you hurt?” he asked in trembling accents.

“No! I think not—certainly not seriously.” The girl’s tones were broken, but brave as ever.

“The rest of you? Is everybody alive? Answer as I call. Joyce?”

“I’m alive, sor, and so is Kathleen.”

“Jackson?”

“Here.”

“Mr. Willoughby?”

“I, too, have escaped.”

Howard drew a long breath. “Thank God! We seem to have our lives, at any rate.”

“What was it, sor?”

“I’m not certain. But I think a wreck must have chosen the very moment of our passage to sink, and must have drawn us down into her vortex. We escaped at last, and are now at the surface. But I fear our machinery is ruined. I’ll open the manhole.”

Turning, Howard clambered back to his perch, and tried to push back the bolts. They were badly jammed, and it took him some time to loosen them; but at last they gave way, and he shoved back the cover and thrust out his head.

The Seashark was rolling gently on smooth weed-clear water. A quarter of a mile away lay a white cruiser, and not a hundred yards distant was a boat rapidly approaching.

Howard rubbed his eyes. "Ahoy, the boat," he called.

The officer in charge gasped. "Way enough," he ordered. "Ahoy, the submarine. Where in heaven did you come from?"

"From mighty near the other place," answered Howard grimly. "Did you torpedo that wreck?"

"That's what we did. We're destroying derelicts, and hunting for a party of castaways from the Queen. Do you know anything about them?"

Howard nodded affirmatively in answer to the officer's question. "Yes," he answered. "We are the castaways—we and three others who escaped with us in this submarine from the little king of the Sargasso Sea. I suppose you know the story that I sent by wireless?"

The boat scraped along. "Know it! I should say so," exclaimed the startled officer. "The whole country knows it. I suppose you are——"

"Frank Howard. Come, Dorothy," Howard climbed to the deck, and helped the girl to follow him. "This is, or, rather, was—Miss Fairfax," he explained. "And you——"

The officer suppressed a whistle of admiration at sight of Dorothy's flower-like face. "I'm McCully!" he answered, as he stood up and took off his cap. "I say! This is awfully lucky. Colonel Fairfax will be wild with delight."

"My father! Where is he?"

“On board the Duluth, yonder. The navy department ordered us to look for you, and he came along. There are a dozen searching for you.”

Dorothy's head swam. The month of stress was over, and the revulsion of feeling was too great not to affect her. Tears started to her eyes as she turned to Howard. “Oh! Frank!” she cried. “Father is here.”

“Yes. He's here, sure,” interjected Mr. McCully, “and if you'll get into this boat we'll take you to him in a jiffy.”

Dorothy looked at Howard inquiringly, and he nodded. “Yes, you'd better go,” he assented. “You and Mrs. Joyce and Willoughby, perhaps. The rest of us will stay here for the present. Mr. McCully, will you kindly ask your captain if he cannot come alongside us? The Sea-shark, though damaged by your torpedo, is still valuable, and, besides, we have about two million dollars in gold bars on board of her.”

The lieutenant looked his astonishment. What manner of man was this who carried two millions of gold about in a submarine. "Two millions?" he gasped.

"Yes! We found an old Spanish galleon with five or six millions on her, and brought away all we could. Look! There's another boat coming. Is that your father on her, Dorothy? And—why, yes, it's Loving, too, isn't it? How frightfully ill he is looking."

Another boat was close at hand. Dorothy looked at her, and clasped her hands with excitement. "Oh! It is!" she cried. "Father! Father! Don't you know me?"

The gray-bearded civilian stood up. "Dorothy! Dorothy!" he trumpeted. "Is it you! Is it really you?"

"Yes! Yes!" As the boat touched the Seashark, the girl fairly sprang into her father's arms. "Oh! father! father!" she cried. "How good it is to see you."

Meanwhile, Lieutenant McCully had turned to Howard and the others, who

had now climbed up on the deck. "The Duluth is moving," he explained. "Captain Morehouse probably intends to come alongside without being asked. Hadn't you all better get into this boat, and let my men fasten your manhole down? The waves from the Duluth might swamp her, you know."

"Thank you. If you'll be so kind. But first let me present my fellow travelers."

In a few moments the Seashark was made safe against swamping, and her former passengers were about to enter the cutter, when Dorothy called to Howard: "Frank, dear, I want you."

Everybody started. Not one there was ignorant of Howard's record, and the use of his Christian name by the girl was somewhat surprising.

"Frank, dear!" cried the girl, alive with excitement. "This is my father. Father, this is Lieutenant Frank Howard, who saved me from death and from worse than death. See, I wear his ring."

She held up her hand, and, at the sight of the plain gold band, Colonel Fairfax's outstretched hand dropped heavily to his side. "A wedding ring," he gasped.

"Yes, father. I am not Dorothy Fairfax any more. I am Dorothy Howard now. Mr. Willoughby married us day before yesterday."

All Colonel Fairfax's coolness; all the aplomb that had made him a master of men; all his traditional self-possession dropped from him, and he stood stammering like any schoolboy.

Dorothy's eyes sparkled. "It's all right, father," she declared. "Frank married me to save me from that horrible Forbes. He didn't want to do so because of that ridiculous accusation against him, but he couldn't help it. I insisted on it. Shake hands with him. You and I are going to find the real murderer, and clear his name."

"But—but—Mr. Loving——"

Loving, his face pale, but with a forced

smile on his lips, struck in. "Hallo, Howard, old man," he said, holding out his hand. "I was just waiting my chance to speak to you. Frank Howard is all right, colonel," he continued earnestly, turning to the elder man. "I've told you so before, you know."

Colonel Fairfax had recovered his poise somewhat. "Well," he said, "this isn't the time or place to talk about it, though it is the time to thank you, Mr. Howard, for saving my girl's life. It nearly killed me when I lost her. Come, let's get on board—Good Heavens! Loving! What's the matter?"

Loving's face had grown white as death, and his distended eyes seemed popping from their sockets. Following his gaze, the others saw Mr. Willoughby picking his way along the Seashark toward them.

"Ah! Mr. Howard," he said, holding out his hand to Loving, "I'm glad to see you here, for, of course, it means that you

must have cleared yourself of that terrible charge. Quite a coincidence having another of the same name in our little party, isn't it? I had meant to speak to him about you, but we have been in such a turmoil that I haven't had the chance."

The changing expressions in the faces of his listeners suddenly caught the good man's attention. "Why! What is the matter?" he explained. "I—I hope I don't—— Surely you have cleared yourself of that charge, Mr. Howard?"

Loving's dry lips moved, but no sound came. The other men, too, were stricken dumb. Only Dorothy found breath.

"This gentleman is Mr. Loving, Mr. Willoughby," she gasped. "Why do you call him Howard?"

The missionary turned a bewildered face to the girl. "I don't understand," he stammered. "I knew this gentleman as Mr. Howard in Porto Rico, where I married him to Dolores Montoro. Later she followed him to New York, and he

was reported to have murdered her. I was coming to testify when I was wrecked, and——”

Loving burst suddenly into a fit of jarring laughter. “You needn’t say any more, Mr. Willoughby,” he cackled. “You’ve put the noose around my neck all right. Yes, I did it, I did it. I married that she-devil under your name, Howard, and when she followed me to New York I killed her. I didn’t mean to get you into it, but you got a letter she intended for me, and butted in just in time to get accused. You’ll bear me witness that I tried to save you; and I would have done it, too, if those fools in Porto Rico hadn’t identified your photograph as the man who married Dolores. All smooth-faced men in uniform look alike to them, I suppose. Well, it’s all up now, and I’m glad of it. Maybe you won’t believe me, but I haven’t had a happy moment since you were arrested. I’m not so bad as you think; that woman was a fiend and—but

there's the ship. I'll go on board and write out a formal confession."

Unseen, the Duluth had approached and, as she ran smoothly alongside, Loving caught a Jacob's-ladder swinging from a boom, and ran up it to the deck.

Before any one could follow, the Duluth swung past, and, when a moment later her reversed screw brought her to a halt, the sound of a pistol-shot in her ward-room told that Loving had signed his confession with his blood.

EPILOGUE

The Sargasso Sea will soon be robbed of half its terrors. The Seashark Wrecking Company, with Howard at its head, and all his party as share-holders, has been formed to recover the great wealth still existing on the derelicts in the sea. It has opened communication with the wreck-pack by a paddle-wheel steamer that is expected to maintain a reasonably clear channel through the weed. The company is projecting a series of relief stations, and will keep up a constant patrol all round the wreck-pack. The expense, of course, will be enormous, but there is no doubt that the enterprise will meet it and will pay an enormous profit besides, even if not a single other treasure ship is found.

A message just received by wireless from the sea says that the first steamer

of the company is about to start back to New York with a tremendously valuable cargo of salvage. It adds that Forbes and all his men have begged for passage, and that it will be granted them. The money left on the galleon, which Forbes was forced to divide, has made them all comparatively rich, and they are anxious to get back to civilization to spend their money. Their departure leaves Howard and his friends with an undisputed title to the salvage of the Isle of Dead Ships.

THE END.

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